

THE ENGLISH STAGE OF TO-DAY



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THE
ENGLISH STAGE
OF TO-DAY ♣ ♣
BY MARIO BORSA
TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL
ITALIAN AND EDITED WITH
A PREFATORY NOTE BY
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PREFATORY NOTE

IN the work of translating and presenting this study of its contemporary drama to the British public I have had a double gratification—first in my own study and enjoyment of a work whose importance, as a very brilliant and comprehensive study of its subject, was at once recognized both in England and Italy, when it was published last year in Milan ; and next, because it seems to me to lend a really effective helping hand to a movement in which many of us—more perhaps than is often imagined—are keenly interested.

For Dr. Borsa when he complains, in his first pages, of the lack among us of a “good prose drama,” when he chronicles his own regrets and those of intelligent and interested foreign critics—such, for instance, as M. Auguste Filon—at this want in our national life, yet comes to admit later on in his own pages, and to admit with sympathetic interest and approval, the many efforts, sometimes tentative as yet, but enthusiastic, many-sided, and often crowned with (even commercial) success, which are being made at this moment in our midst to meet that want.

“His book”—said Mr. William Archer, speaking of the first Italian edition—“presents not only a wide but a minute survey of the Stageland of to-day and

yesterday. . . . He has studied not only the theatre itself, but whatsoever is written and said about the theatre—criticisms, gossip, interviews, speeches at O.P. dinners, and, in short, all the multitudinous babble that goes on around the drama. . . . Signor Borsa, in a word, is an impressionist painter, not a philosophic historian. But his impressionism is always individual and suggestive. He is a keen observer, and, wherever he deals with an individual play, he shows himself an acute and intelligent critic."

This was written in November of 1906. But the theatre world moves so quickly that since then we have found it advisable in this new edition to entirely revise the work, adding new facts, fresh points of interest, and bringing it thoroughly up to date ; in this work of revision I must here acknowledge my cordial thanks both to the collaboration of the author himself and of my friend Mr. Francis F. Cox, who has now been associated with me for some years as a sub-editor, and whose knowledge of Italian idiom has here proved most invaluable.

The problem of the modern drama lies very close to us here in London, at the heart of the Empire. But in this instance London surely means England, and England will bring with her the Empire, and will touch immediately that vast complex life of the North American continent ; for though it is obvious to the student of theatre production that a London success by no means connotes the same in New York or Boston (or vice versa), yet I found in a visit to those cities last summer how closely the claims and aspirations of the English-speaking theatre world were interrelated.

And here we have the subject-matter of this drama in almost bewildering amplitude at our very doors, as my author says, in that passage of his whose literary beauty I have tried to keep: “in this very London, where Life pours forth its power in great floods, rises and falls, struggles and rests, triumphs and curses, sneers and smiles . . . in this City of Paradoxes, where the real has always something of the fantastic and the hideous something of the beautiful—this Enchantress London, who ends by bewitching even those who have most detested her.” We have all the complex modern life of a great Empire lying before us, with its infinitude of inspiration, beside the picturesque opportunities (which we shall see that Irving himself preferred, but always in sincere and strong dramatic handling) offered by the records of past story; and we have already in our midst a movement which finds its record to some extent in these pages—to which the best work of the later Victorian dramatists has pointed the way, to which the revival of ancient local pageants will surely prove an effective auxiliary—and whose aim it is to create a national drama worthy of ourselves, worthy of our great literary tradition, and of our place in modern history.

What we need is the public; and if even my author has here and there said some hard (and true) things of this “great British public,” I refuse to believe that the nation which produced Marlowe, Webster, Shakespeare, Congreve, Sheridan, which already takes such a keen and growing interest in the theatre, will remain, in its great majority, permanently dead to the higher side of dramatic art. Rather would I suggest that,

as a pebble thrown into some quiet, broad, self-complacent pool (and we have some really efficient living slingers, one of whose initials inspires my fourth chapter) stirs it in ever-widening circles, so by presenting the best art we shall by degrees—little by little—widen fresh circles of sympathetic adherents in London, in her great circle of suburbs, and throughout the land, throughout the Empire—till it shall be the “great British public” itself, at the last, who will be content with nothing less than the best in modern drama.

SELWYN BRINTON.

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CHAPTER I

THE PLAYGOERS

I

FOR those who take a serious and absorbing interest in all that pertains to Art, one of the greatest drawbacks to life in London is the lack of good prose drama. If one were planted in a semi-barbarous region of Asia or Africa, instead of in the modern metropolis of a mighty Empire, one would be less conscious of this deficiency. And yet London is overrun with theatres !

Of these there are fifty-nine—without counting the sixty-one music-halls and the six hundred and thirty other halls, in which spectacles of one sort or another are presented by day or night. Never has the theatrical art, or, I should say, the theatrical industry, been so prosperous and flourishing. Let it suffice to say that in London every year millions are spent, and

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that not less than twenty-five thousand persons are employed in connection with the legitimate stage.

The responsibility for these figures must rest with the novelist Jerome K. Jerome, who made the calculation in a lecture to the O.P. Club; but it is certain that they give but a faint idea of the magnitude of the London theatrical trade.

Proprietors, shareholders, lessees, managers, authors and actors make enormous fortunes out of it. Often a single play turns out to be a gold-mine. *The Second in Command*, one of the most successful dramatic works of late years, within a short period yielded its author, Captain Robert Marshall, the sum of £30,000. George R. Sims was recently drawing £20,000 a year in author's fees; while Barrie, during a season in which two of his plays were simultaneously billed in London and New York, was receiving £480 a week!

Nor are the actor's profits less considerable. The salary of a moderate actor sometimes amounts to as much as £100 a week. Should the actor be at the same time a manager, his weekly receipts may reach a total of from £300 to nearly £500 a week. In the money market theatrical shares are always on the upward grade, even during periods of general financial depression. In short, the whole business is one gigantic "boom," as they say in the City—a "Tom Tiddler's Ground," as we might less prosaically call it, from which every one in any way connected with the stage is reaping a golden harvest—thanks to the honest public!

The public is insatiable! It never has enough! In ten years playgoers have increased in numbers by

forty-four per cent ; while during the same period the total number of theatres has risen eighteen, and of music-halls forty-five per cent. The theatrical craze has become a very madness. In London, where everything passes unobserved ; where the continuous rush is so level and monotonous ; where the life of the streets, with all its phases and episodes, melts, as it were, and merges into one single, immense, confused, tiresome roar ; in London, where, more than in any other city on earth, the crowd is so characterless and inscrutable, one of the few things which make a striking impression on the spectator is the daily spectacle afforded by the masses of playgoers on their way to and from the theatre.

Each morning trains hasten from every point of the compass to the great central stations with their loads of professional and business men, clerks, and employés in the common uniform of the City ; each evening these same trains disgorge hundreds and thousands of fair ladies elegantly attired, accompanied by their well-groomed male escorts. Beneath the lofty, massive, and gloomy station roof, between the slimy, blackened walls, among the tireless, panting engines—grimy with soot and ruddy with the glow of furnace doors—through the foul, smoky, suffocating atmosphere of the station, they thread their way—delicate visions of white, pale blue, or pink, in hoods or wraps of Japanese silk, embroidered slippers and fleecy boas, wrapped in their brocaded opera cloaks, beneath which stray glimpses are caught of the lace and chiffon of evening bodices—on they flit, with a fantastic shimmer of pearls and diamonds, with a soft rustle of silks, satins, and tulle.

These are the patrons of the stalls and boxes, on their way to the theatre to see and to be seen, who will finish up the evening gaily with champagne in the warm, brilliantly lighted, gilded saloons of the "Cecil" and the "Savoy." But no less interesting and noteworthy are the patrons of the pit and galleries.

Any one passing through the Haymarket, the Strand, or Shaftesbury Avenue on *matinée* days, or on any evening except Sundays, may see at one theatre or another an interminable file of people waiting long and patiently for the doors to be opened. Summer and winter the scene is always the same; in grey, damp fog, filling and irritating nose and eyes, in rain that penetrates to the bones, in blustering gales, in sweltering, suffocating heat, the crowd never flinches. It remains planted there for hours, quiet, orderly, and silent, under the vigilant eye of the policeman tramping steadily up and down in his enormous boots—some seated on camp-stools brought with them; some deep in the perusal of novels, magazines, or newspapers; some studying the playbill; others munching sweets. Meanwhile the newsboys arrive, running and out of breath, with the special editions and latest cricket, football, or racing results: "All the winners! All the winners!" Counterfeit nigger minstrels regale the waiting throng with "Home, sweet home!" to a banjo accompaniment; while a dismal Italian organ stops at the kerb to grind out an air from *Trovatore*!

It is a mixed crowd, formed for the most part of small parties and courting couples. There are shopmen, clerks, and spinsters in pince-nez; but more numerous still are the shopgirls, milliners, dressmakers, typists,

stenographers, cashiers of large and small houses of business, telegraph and telephone girls, and the thousands of other girls whose place in the social scale is hard to guess or to define, who avail themselves of the liberty allowed them by custom, and the coldness of the English masculine temperament, to wander alone at night from one end of London to the other, spending all their money in gadding about, on six-penny novels, on magazines, and, above all, on the theatre.

The British drama has such an attraction for them, and offers them so much instruction ! I once read in the *Daily Telegraph*, under the theatrical announcements, a notice conceived in these terms : “Who wants a husband ? Statistics show that ninety per cent. of women, when they have reached a marriageable age, are only awaiting the first opportunity in order to get married ; yet hundreds remain old maids. Perhaps husbands are scarce ! Do you want to know why you do not get one ? Go and see *Her Forbidden Marriage* at the Standard Theatre. Every evening at 7.45 p.m. ; matinée every Saturday at 2 p.m.”

The passion displayed by girls for the theatre, with its inevitable accompaniment of secret infatuations for actors, of languors and excitements, has developed of late years into a real hysterical malady, studied by physicians, psychologists, and sociologists, with great diversity of diagnosis and from different points of view, but with a certain amount of agreement as to the remedy suggested—work, fresh air, and matrimony ! (See *Her Forbidden Marriage!*)

For this histriomania is not confined to attendance

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at the theatre ; it is complicated and rendered more acute by a complex and morbid interest in everything connected with the stage.

There are some fifteen clubs whose members are united by the sole bond of a common love for the dramatic art—a real theatrical Arcadia, wholly sacred to the discussion of plays and artistic tendencies, the reading of theatrical compositions, as in Pailleron's *Monde où l'on s'ennuie*—the organization of dinners in honour of some author or actress, and meetings for the consideration of dramatic subjects.

Amateur dramatic clubs are legion ! There is one for every district in London and for every city in the provinces. Every one is bitten by the mania for acting. Performances take place in the family circle, in social clubs, schools, colleges, and the Universities. The recitations of the local greengrocer, chemist, or cobbler are a feature of the "penny readings" organized by the parson of the parish. Peers and peeresses take part in dramatic performances at their town houses and country seats. The late Lord Anglesey transformed the chapel of his ancestral castle in Wales into a theatre, modelled on that of Dresden, and installed in it a permanent dramatic company, which he subsequently took on tour, himself filling the rôles of principal comedian and star, and finally died at the age of twenty-nine, at Monte Carlo, loaded with debt, after squandering a patrimony which yielded him an annual income of £100,000—a victim to his love of art !

Then there are some fifty illustrated theatrical periodicals, well got up, full of portraits, stage news, and anecdotes, without counting the magazines, weekly

illustrated and daily papers, which regularly devote columns to the theatre, its heroes and heroines, and its endless gossip.

The cult of the actor and actress is a new development—of the nature of Carlyle's “hero worship.” The actor looms large in the public eye ; London lies at his feet. His portrait is everywhere—at the photographer's, the bookseller's, on posters, picture post cards, and even on table services and other articles of china. In France, Germany, and Italy the theatres take their names from Molière, Schiller, and Goldoni ; in London they are named after actors, and so we have the Garrick Theatre, Wyndham's, Terry's, Penley's, etc. Even the publishing trade exploits this fetish-worship to its utmost extent, and one of the finest and most elegant editions of Shakespeare derives its title from the celebrated actress, Ellen Terry.

Can the actor's ambition soar higher ! The British Empire, in contrast to that of Rome, invests him with a dignity which has received the seal of official sanction. Historians tell us that no Roman senator would ever condescend to enter an actor's house, nor would a Roman knight be seen with one in the public street. In London, on the other hand, the actor is an honoured guest at the annual banquets of the Lord Mayor and the Royal Academy, side by side with Princes of the Blood, ambassadors of all the Powers, bishops, judges, generals, members of the Government, and leaders of the Opposition ; while, after the speech of the Prime Minister, the Stage invariably forms the subject of one of the regulation toasts.

Still, in spite of all this booming and histriomania,

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one of the greatest intellectual privations from which the foreigner suffers in London is, I repeat, the lack of good comedy and good prose drama.

This want is felt and lamented by the more intelligent section of the public. Remedies have been sought; causes have been investigated; cures have been proposed. The subject is studied and discussed, experiments are made, and up to the present time the result is—nil! The crisis has lasted for a good while, but during the past three or four years it has become absolutely spasmodic in its intensity. The cry is universal. Open any daily or weekly paper, magazine, or serious monthly review, and in every number you will find the same jeremiad. Books are written, conferences are held, inquiries are conducted at home and abroad. Every one is asked for his opinion. Those of Sarah Bernhardt, Björnson, Coquelin, Herivue, Coppée are consulted. Attempts are made to arouse the Government from its apathy. Appeals are made to the generosity of American millionaires, who often squander millions on less worthy objects. Schools of dramatic art are opened. Schemes are proposed for imitating the happy experiment of Antoine, and founding independent theatres in London also.

The problem is exciting the attention of all who have at heart the future, I will not say of art alone, but of the Anglo-Saxon race itself. Stead, the well-known editor of the *Review of Reviews*, who out of respect for his own Puritan principles had reached the age of fifty-five without ever having set foot inside a theatre, one fine evening took his courage in both

hands, and having once crossed the threshold became a regular playgoer, in order personally to investigate the causes of the decline of the drama. And if Stead, with all the enthusiasm and the resources of an apostle, fails to find a remedy, it must mean that the case is indeed a desperate one.

In the meantime, since the evil lasts and is the subject of so much controversy, let us also attempt on our own account a rapid diagnosis.

What is the precise character of this crisis? The public has lost its taste for the artistic and serious drama; its desires are all for the frivolous and the commonplace; authors have not the courage to resist the popular tendency, and the managers take very good care not to attempt it. The public prefers operetta to comedy, and pantomime to drama. Why is this so? What are the causes of this apostasy in the country of Marlowe and Shakespeare? What are the forces which hinder the elevation and modernization of the British drama? Whence this triumph of buffoonery and tomfoolery over art?

Let us, first of all, hear what the English themselves have to say on this subject.

On one point critics and authors are agreed—that it is the system that ruins the English stage. For better comprehension let us compare it with our own. The Italian theatre is a repertory theatre: the English is a theatre of long runs. With us, companies are formed to play a whole repertory of comedies and dramas; in London, companies are formed to play *one* comedy or drama only. With us, dramatic companies have no fixed theatre; they tour from city to city; they remain

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for a month in one place, for two months in another, and wherever they go they perform a very varied assortment of works old and new. In London, the actor has his own permanent theatre, of which he is either proprietor or lessee, and there he performs one single work for perhaps a year at a time. Afterwards, with the same play, he will continue to tour the provinces, and even America and the Colonies.

It is easy to understand that under such a system, in choosing a play for representation on the London stage, it is necessary that the choice should be a safe one, and that it should be guided solely by the probabilities of financial success. The actor-manager has built up a magnificent industry out of the dramatic art ; but, keeping before his eyes solely the question of profit, he has never cared to educate the taste of his public. The public desires buffoonery ? Very good, let us play the buffoon ! Tree, after a series of performances of *Julius Cæsar*, doffs the *chlamys* of Antony and dons the doublet of D'Artagnan in a grotesque choregraphic adaptation of the *Three Musketeers*. Actors of every country keep their eye on the main chance—it is only fair, and no more than human ; but the English actor-manager has developed this tendency to a greater degree than his colleagues of all the other nations put together. He seldom takes the trouble to read authors' manuscripts. Those of unknown writers he does not read, for the very reason that they are unknown, and therefore even though they had the talent of Molière, it would certainly not be the actor-manager who would take upon himself the thankless task of introducing them to the public. Those of

well-known writers it is unnecessary for him to read ; for even were the play the veriest rubbish imaginable, the name of the author would be sufficient to make it go down. Witness the case of Sir Henry Irving and Sardou's *Dante* !

Frequently the actor-manager himself commissions the work he may require from this or that fashionable author, just as he might order a coat from his tailor or a pair of shoes from his shoemaker. The work, it goes without saying, must always conform to certain exigencies of theatrical opportunism, by which the unhappy author finds himself more harassed and confined than, in times past, by the famous three unities of Aristotle. If he accept these limitations, well and good ! if not, the order is placed elsewhere.

Besides, the author—unless he be a celebrity—counts for little. On the bills his name appears either not at all or in the smallest of print ; while that of the actor-manager figures in letters a foot high, beneath a striking likeness of his noble and inspired lineaments. Even the theatrical announcements in the newspapers, instead of giving, as with us, the names of the theatre, the playwright, and the title of the play, simply proclaim those of the theatre and its actor-manager.

The theatre itself, I may mention again, is often the property of the actor-manager. But even if it does not happen to be so, and he is merely the lessee, he still exercises an absolute dictatorship over it. The public pays, but does any member of the public suppose that he has any right whatever to the place he occupies ? Not a bit of it ! Let him prove it, if he likes, by protesting that he is unable to see, on account

of the hats of the ladies in front of him ; or to hear, on account of the noise made by late comers ! Let him try, even in the most unexceptionable manner, to obtain a hearing for his legitimate grievances ! The actor-manager will make no bones about it. He will let loose a dozen policemen upon the pit, and the protester will simply be taken by the collar and thrown out ! This actually happened at the Criterion in February, 1903.

Possibly our playgoer may think he has a right to hiss or, I should say, bellow (for in English theatres they do not hiss, but make a noise resembling the lowing of a cow, which is called "booing"), in order to express disapproval ? Intolerable presumption ! It is true that if he goes to a restaurant he may say to the proprietor, "This fish is not fresh. I don't pay for food that is not fit to eat. Take it away, and bring me another dish." But if an actor-manager serves him up a dramatic dish which stinks aloud to the four winds of heaven, let him not, for mercy's sake, venture to tell him that for the money paid at the door he expects better fare !

One evening in the winter of 1904 I was present at the New Theatre, the occasion being the first night of *Husband and Wife*. I do not remember the name of the author ; it is even possible that I never knew it. The only prominent feature in the bill was the name of Sir Charles Wyndham, the esteemed actor-manager knighted not long ago by King Edward. The play was absolutely impossible. The occupants of the gallery (those of the stalls and boxes never excite themselves) preserved an attitude of polite patience all

through the evening, but as soon as the curtain had descended ventured to express their disapproval by means of the customary booing. Suddenly Sir Charles appeared before the footlights, in accordance with the custom which ordains that the actor-proprietors of English theatres shall present themselves on every "first night" before the public, to announce the author's name, and return thanks for the reception of the play by the audience. Sir Charles opened his mouth to speak, but the booing still continued. Then, being unable to air the speech he had prepared, he was struck by an idea.

"Oh, if I had but a friend in the gallery who would relieve me from these insolent tormentors!"

At a first night the actor-proprietor always has friends in the gallery—and in all other parts of the house! Sir Charles's words were taken as a signal—almost as an order. His friends forthwith fell upon the booers, and kicked and hustled them out of the theatre.

As a measure of prudence, Sir Charles kept the gallery closed for a month or more. In the meantime, the booers having been forcibly eliminated, *Husband and Wife* pursued their rapturous honeymoon without interruption for a space of six months.

The result was a case in the police-court and a long controversy in the newspapers. William Archer, the celebrated critic, put the question: "To boo or not to boo?" There was no reply, and the problem still weighs with Shakespearian perplexity upon playgoers, upon critics, upon magistrates, upon

No! *not* upon actor-managers! *They* have no doubt

whatever as to the best way with malcontents—"Chuck 'em out!"

A few months afterwards, in the autumn of 1904, an analogous case occurred. Mrs. Craigie (known to the London literary world as John Oliver Hobbes) produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, a melodrama written by herself and entitled *The Flute of Pan*. As a melodrama it was not a success; there was booing. Authoress and actress-manager were filled with pardonable resentment, but being women they hardly cared to have recourse to force, after the manner of Sir Charles Wyndham. What was to be done? They announced a free performance of the work; tickets for the boxes, stalls, and gallery were distributed through the medium of a newspaper; the public, it need hardly be said, flocked in crowds and applauded with frenzy. Thus *The Flute of Pan*, rehabilitated by this success, placid, serene, and unprejudiced, continued to give forth its sweet sounds for I don't know how long.

The boozers were baffled and ashamed. But the lesson was deserved. What would be the end of it, if so little respect were to be shown to Art and her Temple? For the actor-manager—let us at least do him that justice—acts and judges always from noble and lofty motives.

The proprietor-manager, who at all events makes no pretence of being an artist, is more frank. Of him too there are many different specimens, of whom some are American men of business. In America dramatic art is entirely under the control of a syndicate, and the American Theatrical Trust is conducted as openly and as exclusively on a commercial basis as the Trust

in oil or that in guano. Americans already control eight of the London theatres, and are working hard to organize a great Trust in England also. But they are encountering considerable opposition on the part of the English or Anglo-Swiss proprietor-managers, some of whom are—or were but a short time back—also restaurant and hotel keepers.

The latter, as is only natural, adopt for the stage the standards that prevail in their kitchens. Their customers require their plays, like their beefsteaks, underdone. "For goodness' sake, then," say the proprietor-managers, "give them what they want, and then they will give us what *we* want."

When the theatrical fare does not directly depend upon an actor-manager or a *restaurateur*-proprietor, it depends upon the manager, a personage who combines the artistic pretensions of the former with the culinary crudeness of the latter. But even with him an unfortunate author who has to make arrangements for a play has his work cut out; for the manager piques himself on possessing tastes and ideas of his own.

Mr. Charles Frohman, the most enterprising of Anglo-American managers, once said: "The kind of piece I am always ready to acquire is the one which a young fellow takes his best girl to see in order to make her think that he is just the same sort of dashing, big-hearted order of fellow as the hero, while his sweetheart devoutly hopes that he will carry away the impression that she herself is exactly modelled on the lines of the beautiful and self-sacrificing heroine. If you can appeal successfully to these two unsophisticated

natures you can depend on filling your theatre for weeks and months to come."

This is Mr. Frohman's hall-mark, and these are the two puppets his authors are commissioned to fit with suitable changes of attire. Is not this sufficient ground for revolt? Is not this sufficient cause for the decadence of English dramatic art? Try writing a play without Mr. Frohman's *mannequins*, or a drama that does not drip with gore! No manager will accept it; no stage will be open to it. It is the present system that kills English dramatic art. Eliminate the actor-manager and the *restaurateur*-proprietor; give us free and independent theatres, and it will blossom forth afresh.

Let us now hear the other side of the story. The actor-managers, the *restaurateurs*-proprietors, and the managers are quite ready to discuss it. They too (who would have thought it?) have at heart the destinies of the dramatic art. They too agree with authors and critics that the English stage is decadent. "Whose fault is it? Ours! There's gratitude for you!" say these worthy gentlemen, "after all the trouble we have taken and are taking! The system has nothing to do with the decay of the English drama; the trouble is not internal, but external, in the shape of the music-hall, which stands at our very threshold and is such a ruthless competitor. In order to neutralize the effects of this competition, we are often compelled to renounce our . . . artistic ideals, and to provide the public with the sort of amusement it prefers."

And these actors, *restaurateurs*, and other managers are not altogether in the wrong—at all events, in their

premises. The music-hall is, in truth, a decomposing force, a rank theatrical weed. In no part of the world has that form of amusement called a "variety show," *café concert*, *café chantant*, or "music-hall" reached the extraordinary degree of development that it has in London. A quarter of a century ago these entertainments were entirely confined to the lower orders, and ranked as places of doubtful reputation where people belonging to what are called the respectable classes never ventured to set foot. To-day they are fitted up with every luxury and comfort. They are frequented by the best society, and are in the hands of powerful syndicates, which have developed them into one of the most profitable of industries. The shares of the Empire rose within a short space of time from 15s. to 65s.! It may be said that every district possesses one of these places of entertainment, and fresh ones are constantly springing up, often upon the ruins of a regular theatre. Even the Lyceum, that classic theatre of Sir Henry Irving and the Shakespearian repertory, was a few years ago closed and converted into a music-hall.

The music-hall is less *décolletée* than the Scala, the Moulin Rouge, or the Folies-Bergères, but it is more vulgar. The entertainment consists of acrobatics, conjuring, songs, ballets, pantomimes in the style of the Parisian *Revue*, living pictures, trained dogs, elephants, parrots and eccentricities of every species and every colour.

Recently the music-hall, in pursuance of its policy of assimilation (one of its proprietors has prophesied that within the space of half a century there will not be

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a regular theatre left in London !), introduced a fresh feature—the “sketch.” This is a short comedy or drama in one act, and lasting about half an hour. A taste of art, for the benefit of any one who may have a weakness that way, sandwiched between a troupe of performing monkeys and a flying leap from the trapeze. However, the innovation did not pass unchallenged. Actor-managers, *restaurateurs*-proprietors, and managers believed that this time the enemy had exposed a vital part, and they hastened to deal him a deadly blow. Music-halls are restrained by law from performing any sort of dramatic composition. There was a long controversy in the newspapers, a lawsuit, and a discussion in the House of Commons.

The law draws a distinction between a theatre and a music-hall. The former is licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, the latter by the County Council. The former is licensed for “stage plays”; the latter for a general variety entertainment. In England, when a law exists, there are also judges who see that it is respected. The Theatrical Managers Association brought an action against the Palace Theatre, Ltd., the proprietary company of one of the most popular music-halls, for having produced a kind of comedietta entitled *La Toledad*. All the shareholders of the music-hall protested that this was nothing but barefaced coercion. Have recourse to Protection for our industries, as Chamberlain proposes, if you will, but—for goodness’ sake—respect the sound Cobdenite traditions in matters of art and amusement. “Free Trade in amusements” was the battle-cry. But the judge was obliged to decide according to the letter of

the law, and compelled the managers of the Palace to withdraw *La Toledad*, and to pay a small fine.

Thus did the theatre triumph over the music-hall. It was however a purely technical triumph. The overflowing prosperity of the music-halls was certainly not due to the "sketch." It both was and is due to the fact that the music-hall represents amusement pure and simple—that it combines gratification for the eye and the senses with cheerfulness and comfort. It both was and is due to the fact that while in a theatre the lights of the auditorium are lowered during a performance, and the spectator presumably has to concentrate his attention on following the *dénouement* of a play, in the music-hall he may continue to revel in the uninterrupted brilliance of the electric light, which produces such delightful optical effects upon the skirts of the ballet girls and the bare shoulders of the *chanteuses*; that while for the theatre he must array himself in evening dress, he may attend the music-hall in the same garments in which he left the City; that while in the theatre he has to content himself with ices or lemonade, in a music-hall he may smoke his pipe or cigar, and order liqueurs or beer just as he might in a bar. Above all, in a music-hall the constraint of fixed seats is abolished, so that while some more or less authentic belle of Seville is dancing the *bolero* on the stage with all the seductions of Andalusian art, he can at least stretch his legs in the "promenade" which runs all round the dress-circle and is always full of attractive damsels, perfumed and *décolletées*.

These, then, are the attractions of the music-hall—tobacco, whisky, and . . . the promenade! And

against these allurements the efforts of the champions of the legitimate drama are as futile as those of the knights of the good old times against the charms of the sirens, who lay in wait *en déshabillé* among the rocks for the purpose of luring passing mariners to destruction.

And, what is more, even clergymen have been seen in these music-halls! And when the Church itself, which ought to join the crusade against this frivolous, vulgar, and immoral form of entertainment, indirectly contributes to its development and its popularity, by lavishing persistent and bigoted condemnation upon the legitimate drama, as in the days of Cromwell, we cannot help feeling a certain amount of sympathy for actor-managers, *restaurateurs*-proprietors, and managers, and are almost tempted to share their belief that it is not altogether in the system that the mischief lies, but that certain outside influences are also engaged in a conspiracy detrimental to the interests of British dramatic art.

Since we are on this subject I may state that the Church may be considered as one of these very influences. Ever since the seventeenth century the Anglican Church has opposed the Drama with the same pertinacity with which she has resisted the Pope and the Devil. The parallel may be carried yet farther. Neither in the case of the Devil or of the Drama are the Church's objections based on personal acquaintance, and for that very reason she depicts the latter in the sombre and repulsive colours of the unknown, and describes it in the solemn and denunciatory language

of the Apocalypse. A few clergymen, like Udall, Home, Heber, and in recent years Forbes Phillips, have insisted on seeing for themselves and even meeting the Devil face to face, and taking him by the horns. They have even gone so far as to write plays with a moral! But this was, alas! a double disaster for Art and for the Church! Canon Liddon—the Chrysostom of the English pulpit—with greater consistency wrote, only a quarter of a century ago, that the entire influence of the stage is exerted in the direction of sin. Hence that Church dignitary who undertook the publication of a daily journal in order to give the world a practical demonstration of the manner in which Christ would have conducted a newspaper, sternly excluded three subjects from its columns—Sport, the Stock Exchange, and . . . the Stage!

The hard, antiquated, *a priori* Puritan logic is still the same. The English Church which, like St. Thomas Aquinas, considers actors to be outside the pale of religion, has founded one of the most curious of associations imaginable, the Actors' Church Union, the object of which is to reclaim actors and actresses who have strayed from the right path by the mere fact of having taken that which leads to the stage! In every provincial city the Union has delegates, whose office is to approach artists who may visit their town, keep a watch over their conduct, keep them company—especially at night when they leave the theatre—and speak to them of the life eternal, of its punishments, and its rewards. Sunday especially—Sunday, which good English Churchmen are supposed to spend between church and their arm-chair, between the Bible

and the Sunday paper—is fraught with danger for the unlucky actors, who are bound to utilize the only day on which the theatres are closed, for travelling. And it is on Sunday that the activity of the Actors' Church Union is most fervid and most acceptable to Heaven!

No one who knows the position occupied by the Church in England, the respect—either sincere or conventional—by which it is surrounded, its direct action upon the manners and customs of all classes of society, the formative influence which it exercises upon the thoughts and morals of the people by its formal prejudices, its limitations, its stupid restrictions, will wonder at the power it wields in literary and artistic matters. Our grandfathers laughed when Cardinal Daniele Delfino, patriarch of Aquileja, purchased the lately erected theatre of Udine, and had it pulled down, calling it a “monument of Pagan superstition”; and in these days no one—not even religious persons—in Italy cares much if a book or a play has been put into the Index by the Pope. But when the Bishop of London condemns *The Gay Lord Quex* of Pinero from the pulpit of St. Paul's, the matter is taken seriously, and even rouses an echo in Parliament.

Can you imagine any European legislative assembly in these days solemnly engaged in discussing the problem of whether the theatre is moral or immoral? And yet this actually happened at Westminster, and I remember being present at the debate which took place in the House of Commons on May 15th, 1900, when Mr. S. Smith, M.P. for Flintshire, moved his resolution deplored the depravity of the comedies and

dramas of the day, and proposing that restrictions should be placed on such plays as *The Gay Lord Quex* and *Zaza!*

Those were the black and anxious days of the South African War, and the honourable member for Flintshire concluded his speech with the following words : “This is a favourable moment to attempt moral reforms. Many families are in mourning. London society has lost its usual gaiety. . . . Is not this the voice of God calling the nation to repentance? Let the House strike a true keynote to-night, and it will awaken a response it little dreams of.”

The debate threatened to be protracted and to take a serious turn, if Mr. Gibson Bowles, the most mirth-provoking speaker in the House, had not intervened and put his colleagues once more into good humour by affirming that Mr. Smith—like our Italian swash-bucklers of the Seicento, who spitted one another in the cause of Tasso or Ariosto without ever having read either—came down to the House to proclaim the immorality of the theatre without ever having set foot in one! “Let Mr. Smith,” he said, “speak from his own experience, and not rely upon what he was told by others. They had been told of semi-nude females. Well, he had never seen quarter-nude females ; but the honourable member might be a little charitable even to low-necked dresses. There were picture and statue galleries all over Europe. Was the honourable member going about with his pockets full of fig leaves?”

This was sufficient to kill the motion of the hon. member for Flintshire, but the question itself still survives and comes to the front now and again in the

public press, the debating societies, the Church, in Parliament, or in the Lord Chamberlain's department, which is also the office of the Censor of Plays.

And here we touch the root of the evil—the Censor ! It is the Censor who is the real enemy—the ruthless, insatiable Cerberus who

Graffia gli spiriti, gli scuoia ed isquarta.

Must the Censor, then, be abolished, it may be asked, before a revival of dramatic art in England is possible? By no means ; the abolition of such a relic of mediævalism would be a national loss.

Preserve the office of the Censor, as you still preserve—as far as I know—that of the Barons of the Cinque Ports, whose duty is to hold a canopy over His Majesty's head, or the Bishop of Lincoln, who receives a salary for lending him the support of his arm in the event of his fainting on the day of his coronation. There is in England a priceless collection of such personages, connected by mysterious ties with the Middle Ages, like marionettes suspended from the ceiling of their puppet-show ; bearers of swords, rods, ewers, and caps, which no longer possess even a symbolical meaning ; king's champions, who encounter no challenger ; masters of royal barges, which are no longer in existence ; carvers of boars' heads, which are no longer eaten ; doorkeepers, chamberlains, knights, prelates, all personages who draw liberal stipends and enjoy great honour and dignity that they may take part in those feudal, spectacular bairlets which the nation of shopkeepers from time to time produces for its own amusement upon the stage

of its grey and monotonous daily existence. From the civic palace of Guildhall, from massive Elizabethan manors buried in their groves of larches, to the halls of the Arts and Trades Guilds squeezed in the heart of the City—everywhere cobwebs are hanging which escaped the operation of that besom with which the Revolution of 1789 made such a clean sweep of the rest of Europe, but stopped on the other side of the Channel.

The Lord Chamberlain's office is only one of these cobwebs, and many dramatic authors have been, and still are, caught in its toils. But this, I repeat, is not a sufficient reason for falling out with the spider. Let him spin ! he is so harmless and amusing !

The Censor's correct—and more dignified—title is that of “The King's Reader of Plays.” Because in England the high office of custodian of public morals is, by a graceful fiction, theoretically vested in the Sovereign, male or female. Thus there is also a King's Proctor, whose duty is to mount guard, on behalf of His Gracious Majesty, upon the chastity of married couples, from the day upon which the President of the Divorce Court has granted a decree *nisi*, until that upon which it is made absolute. The King's Reader was appointed centuries ago—if I am not mistaken, in the days of Great Eliza. But the censorship was, in its inception, more political than anything else. Jonson, Marston, and Chapman came under the operation of the censorship, and were imprisoned for political allusions, and a comedy of Massinger was prohibited lest it might offend Spanish susceptibilities at the moment in which a marriage was being negotiated

between Charles I and the Infanta of Spain. After the Restoration English comedy became as immoral as the Italian of the sixteenth century. The King's Reader shut one eye to all the obscenity of the contemporary drama, but he opened them both and fell upon any unlucky playwright whom he suspected of offering a slight to the monarchy, which in all ages and countries has always claimed a higher measure of respect than that accorded to virtue. Shakespeare's *Richard II*, for instance, was prohibited because it was feared that the story of the dethroned monarch might recall the yet recent history of Cromwell ! —

The Censor's control of dramatic affairs received Parliamentary sanction in 1737, through the medium of that astute Walpole who ordered the Haymarket Theatre to be closed in order to stop the mouth of Henry Fielding, who had ventured to denounce from the stage his Parliamentary corruption ! Finally, in 1843, by an Act of Parliament, regulations were drawn up for the censorship, under which it flourishes to this day. In obedience to this Act, before offering your "acting copy" to one of the many *restaurateurs*-proprietors of the London theatres, you must carry it to the Lord Chamberlain and pay him two guineas in order that he may see whether or no, in the opinion of the King's Reader, it contains anything prejudicial to the public morals. If the verdict is favourable, you will obtain, like a retailer of whisky or gin, your precious licence and are entitled to have your work produced upon the stage. But should the opinion of the reader of plays unfortunately be unfavourable, and you still risk the performance of the work, every one

who takes part in it is liable to a fine of £50—from the author to the leading actor, from the latter to the “chucker-out,” and from the chucker-out to the fireman on duty. No one escapes !

It is true that the opinion of the Examiner of Plays is almost always an enlightened one. Did he not prohibit Ibsen, Sudermann, Hauptmann, and Tolstoi? Did he not impose his veto on Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* and on D'Annunzio's *Città Morta*? Where could you find a more scrupulous or a wiser guardian of the public morals? Also from the point of view of religion your conscience may be free from alarm. You run no risk of any shock to your feelings—even if you go to Covent Garden. Rubinstein's *Christ* was never passed by the Censor, out of consideration alike for Nonconformists and for Churchmen. Gounod's *Reine de Saba* was performed; but entirely transformed and under the title of *Irene*. Massenet's *Herodias* underwent a similar metamorphosis of all its characters, even to St. John the Baptist, who was transformed by the Examiner of Plays into an obscure political agitator, an antique variety of *Carbonaro*.

Still, a certain amount of progress has been made. We must be just. Of late years a play is rarely prohibited, except on strictly moral or religious grounds. I can only call to mind a single exception. In 1902 a melodrama on a Turkish theme, entitled *Secrets of the Harem*, after triumphantly making the tour of the provinces, was produced in London. This fact, it is not known how, was reported to Yildiz Kiosk, and the Porte (which had just forbidden the performance of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides, in Constantinople,

lest the assassination of Agamemnon might be interpreted as a glorification of regicide) speedily set in motion its Ambassador accredited to the Court of St. James's. The Ambassador communicated with the Foreign Office, the Foreign Office with the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Chamberlain with Mr. Redford—the actual Examiner of Plays—and the *Secrets of the Harem* remained such, as far as the London public was concerned.

I imagine that Lord Lansdowne—the most courteous and conciliatory Minister for Foreign Affairs that England has ever had—must have apologized for the performance as an oversight on the part of the Censor, which makes it all the stranger!—since that official reads everything attentively before giving his opinion, unless, of course, immorality should be manifest in the first few lines or in the very title. Then it would be waste of time to proceed further! Not long ago Mr. Arthur Shirley presented to the Lord Chamberlain, together with the customary two guineas, a play entitled *The White Slaves of London*, in order that it might be read and the usual licence granted. But neither Lord Chamberlain nor Examiner would hear of even opening the “author’s copy.” What impertinence was this! Was not Mr. Shirley aware that slavery had long been abolished in England?

Mr. Shirley explained that the title was metaphorical, that the play treated of the poor of London, and that the poor, alas, were not yet abolished—even in England! But the Examiner of Plays remained firmly entrenched in the historical position he had taken up. The press, including *The Times*, took up the case, but without

result. The press—to its honour be it said—protests every time the Censor applies his veto. When D'Annunzio's *La Cittá Morta* was prohibited, the *Morning Post*, full of indignation, wrote that the existence of the dramatic censorship is an anachronism, and will be abolished the moment the public commences to take a vital interest in the theatre. Let us then, it suggested, begin by reforming the public.

These are golden words. But let the Italian reader endeavour not to smile when he hears that on this idea of reforming the public being mooted in England, it was proposed to commence by reforming the hours of its meals! On the evening of October 17th, 1903, the Lord Mayor, whose duty it is during his year of office to dine with half London in turns, gave a dinner to journalists, men of letters, playwrights, and actors. The duty of responding to the toast of dramatic art, or, as the English call it, the Drama, fell to A. W. Pinero, and his bright little speech reached the highest level of Anglo-Saxon postprandial oratory. This, said in effect the author of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, was one of those rare occasions upon which dinner and the drama met upon friendly terms; they were generally in direct antagonism. And the witty author proceeded to assert that the one evil from which the serious drama suffers is the lateness of the Londoner's dinner-hour! Rather than dine earlier, or shorten his repast in order to arrive at the theatre in time for the rise of the curtain, he goes to a music-hall, where he can drop in at any hour without inconvenience. Was it not then clearly the proper course to reform the hours of meals?

Would it not be possible to encourage “high tea” about five o’clock, and commence theatrical performances at seven or half-past seven o’clock instead of half-past eight, and thus leave time for a substantial supper after the play?

The idea started by Pinero at the Mansion House after the champagne, was taken up—it is unnecessary to mention—next morning by the whole press and discussed for months. The controversy was truly interesting and exhilarating, and attracted contributions from authors, critics, playgoers, hotelkeepers, and cooks, in which arguments, both artistic and culinary, of every kind and of every flavour were bandied about. The O. P. Club, which of late years has become a species of hospital for each and every kind of dramatic infirmity, organized a popular ballot as to the hour at which performances should commence. The voting was somewhat discouraging. John Bull, conservative in all things, is particularly so in all that touches his beef and potatoes. And thus, in spite of the conciliatory initiative of Pinero, dinner and the drama remained, and still remain, antagonistic one to the other.

In Paris, Vienna, or Rome theatre-going is not as arduous an undertaking as in London. Are you for the play to-night? Nothing easier! You may return home as usual from office or studio, eat your dinner in peace, then a brush-up, a clean collar, a pair of gloves, a cab or a tram, and there you are! But in London it is quite another matter. In order to reach the theatre punctually at half-past eight, you must have taken your tickets some days beforehand, leave the City an hour before your usual time, change into evening dress, and

commit yourself to the train again for another half-hour or longer—a lengthy and complicated operation, as any one may see.

But, the reader will think, could it not be curtailed, say, for instance, by abolishing the custom of evening dress? or are swallow-tails and *décolleté* absolutely indispensable to the appreciation of a Shakespearian tragedy, or a performance by Sarah Bernhardt? The proposal—revolutionary as it is—was made by the actor-manager, George Alexander, of the St. James's Theatre. Better that he had never made it! Hear how the *Daily Mirror*, the ladies' newspaper, received it. “We confess to having read with some surprise and not a little concern the letter written by Mr. George Alexander to yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*. . . . What concerns us, what overwhelms us with apprehension, and tempts us to question the stability of the universe itself, is that a gentleman, eminent both as a manager and an actor, should treat the playhouse with so much disrespect. . . .

“We have been highly scandalized by Mr. Pinero's suggestion that we should abandon our dinner in order to attend the play, but that was a small matter compared with the shock of this second proposal. Is it for this, we would ask, that the stalls of the St. James's Theatre have so regularly been thronged with beautiful and devoted women? Is it for this that they have languished night after night in the boxes and dress circle, with an answering sigh for every flash from Mr. George Alexander's melting eyes? Is it for this that young gentlemen engaged in the study of fashion have nightly attended if haply they might find some

new secret in the rolling of a collar or the adjustment of a scarf-pin? Is it for this that young ladies on a visit from the country, and desiring to see Mr. George Alexander and die, have counted the days before a performance as grievous and intolerable burdens? . . . Cruelty could go no farther. . . . But granted (with a shudder, and for the sake of argument) that Mr. Alexander's proposal were carried out, would the result be universally desirable? Would the theatre be improved? . . ."

No, the lady writers of the *Daily Mirror* and their fair readers may possess their souls in peace, the theatre would not be improved. There are gentlemen as eminent as Mr. Alexander, who do not believe in the abolition of evening dress any more than they believe in the abolition of the censorship. Partial reforms, they tell you, will never lead to anything. If we desire to save English dramatic art from bankruptcy, we must appeal to the State!

Alas! this too is no new idea. It is the ancient fad of a national theatre cropping up in England after being for over a century the occasion of endless ribaldry and much waste of ink in Italy—the fad of subsidized theatres, of Government schools of acting, of municipalized art! The idea is constantly recurring in all countries and in all ages.

Whenever the dramatic art cannot stand upright on its own legs, the support of the State is at once invoked, as if the State could endow the public with taste, the playwright with genius, or the actor with that *diabolical* of which Voltaire spoke to Madame Duchesnoi! "The greatest benefit the State can

confer upon the stage," said Ferdinando Martini with excellent judgment, "is to let it alone." When Mirabeau inquired of Frederic II why it was that he had never given any encouragement to the national literature, he replied, "And what service could I have rendered to German men of letters so great as that of neither paying them any attention nor reading their books?"

But only attempt to argue on these lines with the English, or to quote to them the prudent words of Frederic II! "Made in Germany" would be their probable reply. "Besides," they would add, "England is not a small country, as was Prussia in 1700. England is a great Empire, and in all great Empires the State has always protected and encouraged literature—witness the examples of Augustus, Louis XIV, Napoleon. While we . . . ! Where will you find a State from an artistic point of view so Boëotian as ours? a State which does not even possess an Academy, to add 'Les choses agréables aux nécessaires, et l'ornement à l'utilité?'" On this point perfect agreement exists between painters, sculptors, playwrights, poets, and novelists. They all feel somewhat humiliated at seeing themselves neglected by a Government which lavishes so many honours and attentions upon brewers and whisky distillers!

When the King and Queen of Italy were guests of the Lord Mayor at Guildhall in November, 1903, a protest appeared in *The Times* that at the banquet given in honour of the Sovereigns of the most artistic country in the world, City merchants, members of Parliament, and representatives of the Army, the

Navy, the Church, and the Law were present, but that not a single representative of the English artistic world was invited. And almost at the same time the poet William Watson drew the attention of the readers of the *Fortnightly Review* to the fact, that out of so many knights and baronets created annually by the King, not even one author had been thought worthy of the title of "Sir."

O tempora ! O mores !

And yet things were not always at this unworthy level ! There was a time when the small and obscure cities of mediæval England showed more solicitude for the dramatic art than the modern metropolis, with all its machinery of borough and county councils. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Coventry, York, and Chester organized religious performances, or "miracle plays," at the expense of the arts and trades guilds, and thus possessed what we should call to-day municipal theatres. It was incumbent upon the members of these guilds, not only to defray the expenses of the performances, but to take part in them themselves with heart and soul. No less filled with zeal than the Greeks, who, as Lucian tells us, if any of their actors were unlucky enough to fail in the part of a divinity, punished them with stripes until the blood flowed, the ancients or "gubernatores" of Beverley, in 1452, imposed a heavy fine upon a poor weaver "quod nesciebat ludum suum." Nor were the performances of the miracle plays assigned by chance to the various guilds ; but to each of them was entrusted the spectacle for which it might be expected to have certain special qualifications. Thus the episode

of Noah and the Ark was confided to the boatmen, that of the Magi to the goldsmiths, that of the Dispute in the Temple to the scriveners, and that of the Last Supper to the bakers.

The *tout ensemble* of the spectacle came under the direct supervision and control of the municipal corporation, which punished the actors who did not act “*bene et sufficienter*,” and which sometimes furnished at its own expense the minstrels and the versemongers, just as in our days the municipality might grant the services of the city band for certain spectacles.

Good old times, when the “*gubernatores et digniores villæ*” vied in fostering representative art, when the lamentable feud between Church and Stage was yet in the womb of the future, and Pope Clement could grant a thousand days’ indulgence to every spectator present at the Miracle Plays of Chester !

In these days so much would hardly be expected from the “*gubernatores*” of the City, or the “*digniores*” of Westminster, or even from the Archbishop of Canterbury—the Anglican equivalent of the Pope. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who finds so many millions for the Empire’s mission of civilization in Asia and Africa, might be asked, “Can you not likewise bestow a thought upon the barbaric tastes of our public at home? Can you not allot a comparatively small sum to the endowment of a theatre for the legitimate drama?” Thus might the abuses be obviated which the system of the long run has created ; variety and refinement in the repertory could be prescribed ; the production of a fixed number of new plays during the year might be made obligatory ; a

good school for actors would be created ; authors would be encouraged, and the popular taste would be educated.

By dint of persistence, the English Government was at length induced to do something. This was nothing less than to organize an inquiry in Europe and America, with the object of ascertaining the working and the practical effect of subsidized theatres. The results of this inquiry are before me, but to tell the truth they do not appear to me to be of such a nature as to lend much support to the theories of the advocates of a national theatre.

The countries lending the greatest amount of assistance to the legitimate stage are France, Belgium, and Denmark. Of France it is unnecessary to speak. Every one knows the extent of the subsidies granted by the French Assembly for the encouragement of dramatic art ; but every one knows also, the Parisians best of all, that the luxuriant growth of the French drama was certainly not due to subventions and control of the State. The best playwrights and actors have triumphed outside the *Comédie*, and often in direct defiance of its traditions and dogmas.

Augustin Filon, referring to this inquiry, wrote in the *Journal des Débats* : "It is no business of mine to reveal to the English the defects of our own system, the petty troubles of our subsidized theatres, and the secret sores of our Conservatoire. Let us pretend that these institutions are faultless, and that they have contributed to the prosperity of our drama—when it really was prosperous. Let us lend our dear neighbours the Decree of Moscow. We might, at a pinch,

even make them a present of it, without exacting any territorial compensation whatsoever. Would it assist their progress to any great extent? I earnestly hope so, but I confess that I am somewhat inclined to doubt it."¹

In Belgium the Minister of Public Instruction subsidizes the first five performances of such plays as are deemed worthy of this assistance by a Commission appointed for the purpose. The subsidy for each performance varies from 40 to 150 francs, according to the number of acts the piece contains! In Denmark, the Royal Theatre at Copenhagen receives an annual subvention of 125,000 kroner (about £7000). Now the Belgian, as well as the Danish public, is undoubtedly more refined than the English, but this is owing to a complexity of causes unnecessary to explain to any one who has the slightest idea of the social and psychological conditions of those two countries, and certainly not to the attention bestowed by their respective Governments on dramatic art. In the meantime it is the fact that in Belgium, as in Denmark, the best critics are opposed to these subsidies, the only effect of which, according to them, has been to encourage mediocrity. Elsewhere, as in Germany, in Austria, in

¹ "Ce n'est pas à moi qu'il appartient de révéler aux Anglais les défauts de notre système, les petites misères de nos théâtres subventionnés et les plaies secrètes de notre Conservatoire. Feignons de croire que ces institutions sont sans défauts et qu'elles ont contribué à la prospérité de notre théâtre . . . lorsqu'il était prospère. Prêtons à nos chers voisins le décret de Moscou. Au besoin nous pourrions leur en faire cadeau, sans exiger aucune compensation territoriale. S'en trouveront-ils beaucoup plus avancés? Je le souhaite vivement, mais j'avoue que j'en doute un peu." Augustin Filon, *Journal des Débats*, April 27th, 1904.

Russia, and in Portugal, certain theatres are subsidized out of the Privy Purse of the Sovereign, or in an indirect form by the State, or by the municipality's providing the site or the building or the lighting, or else by exemption from taxes, or by the provision of furniture, scenery, and costumes.

With all their riches, the United States' Treasury does not contribute a farthing to the support of the drama. This might appear to be a good argument in favour of subventions and Government control, since in the United States the dramatic art has sunk to a low and exceedingly vulgar level. But, on the other hand, we also see that not even those countries which expend large sums on the lyric or the legitimate drama are able to produce great composers or dramatic authors.

In proportion to their population and their revenue, the small republics of Central America display greater munificence towards the stage than any other state of either the Old or the New World: and yet, as far as I am aware, this munificence has failed to foster a national art on the soil of either Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, or Salvador! In my opinion, the only real advantage that can result from a State subvention is that the subsidized theatre or company can thereby be compelled to give a certain number of high-class performances at popular prices. The experiment has been tried with excellent results in certain cities of Germany, Norway, and Russia.

At Giessen the theatre receives 3000 marks annually from the municipality, on the condition that at least twelve popular performances shall be given every season, at which tickets are sold at the price of

50 pf., or sixpence, for the pit, and 25 pf. for the gallery.

The theatre of Bergen, too, the most artistic city in Norway, receives 5000 kroner a year from the municipality in return for an undertaking to give twelve performances at popular prices. In Russia the "Narodny Dom," or popular theatres, established in 1898, are very common. They are to be found in St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Kieff, and Kharkoff, and from 1898 to 1903 the Government spent on their theatres about £320,000!

Up to the present time we have been recapitulating the opinions of the English themselves as to the causes of the decay of their drama; but, unless I am mistaken, the reasons they adduce for this decay are either merely indirect or else partial. The system of long runs, of actor-managers, and *restaurateurs*-proprietors, the competition of the music-hall, puritanism, the censorship, the middle-class and conventional customs of playgoers, the want of interest displayed by the State, explain up to a certain point—if they explain anything at all—the lack of serious, refined, and artistic drama. If a full and satisfactory explanation be required, it must be sought for in the public itself; not in the hours of its meals, as Pinero once humorously suggested, but in the nature of its intelligence, in the peculiarity of its tastes, and in its general spiritual conditions.

Because, if it is perhaps an exaggeration to say that the theatre is an emanation of the age, that it is either good or bad, moral or immoral, serious or frivolous, according as these same qualities are displayed in men

and manners, it is nevertheless true that—in distinction to other literary forms—it depends for its existence and for its prosperity above everything else on the favour of the public.

Now, is the English public of the present day such as would be likely to regard with favour a refined, intellectual, artistic stage—a stage which without performing the functions either of the pulpit, the platform, or the professorial chair, would still possess a background of ideas and an atmosphere of poetry; a stage which would aspire to some higher office than that of a distraction and a pastime, and would aim at providing the powerful and complex æsthetic pleasures of a work of art?

It is true that much depends on what one understands by the term “public”; but in England, side by side with an elect, intellectual aristocracy, which is refined and cultured owing, so to speak, to natural and spontaneous qualities quite independent of its surroundings, there is also the “great British public,” the creature of the modern industrial civilization, with ideas, sentiments, and tastes moulded by its environment. Now this modern Anglo-Saxon industrial and democratic civilization, which has produced a living type politically, socially, and morally superior, which has awakened and rejuvenated all the highest human energies, which has discovered fresh springs of wealth, and opened up fresh fields of activity—this superb civilization with all its scientific conquests, its mechanical and electric marvels, and its continual victories over matter, has done little enough to elevate, to enoble, and to refine the spirit of the masses whom it has summoned, in such

countless numbers, to participate in its innumerable benefits.

It has raised the general conditions of living, it has diffused wealth, and brought comfort within the reach of the masses ; but in consolidating, in fashioning, and reducing to order the fresh, immense aggregations of humanity which exist by and through labour, it has found it necessary to impose certain laws of uniformity upon this newly-created Society, without which it would be impossible for it to act or to prosper. Uniformity is the oil which lubricates this huge and most complicated machine, and enables it to run without interruptions and without damage—uniformity in social conventions and relations, uniformity in the ideas, the habits, and the external aspects of life.

Consider how these people live ! Individually, the small English houses have much to recommend them ; but once a pattern has been found which, while satisfying all the exigencies of comfort, represents the minimum of expense, it is reproduced upon a huge scale with a monotony which ends by becoming odious and insupportable. On entering these middle-class dwellings one finds everywhere the same arrangement and distribution of rooms, the same fireplaces, the same doorways, the same conveniences, the same furniture, the same ornaments, and the same pictures. Of every object in common use a machine-made type has been evolved which has been reproduced mechanically in thousands—and even millions—of copies, which are cheap and therefore within the reach of every purse. A settled, regular, economical type, a universal standard model—it is at this that the producer aims,

and it is to this that the consumer has adapted himself.

This system has produced a characteristic Anglo-Saxon verb, to "standardize," meaning to reduce to a common level—to uniformity. In material manufactures this standard is brought down to the level of the purchasing power of the average purse; in art, literature, and the drama, it is brought down to the intellectual level of the masses. And the nature of this standard and commercial literature may be gauged by English books and magazines, and by English plays.

No nation in the world reads so diligently as the English; men and women, girls and boys always have either a book or paper or magazine in their hands. The trains which come and go through London, which pass above the level of its roofs, rumble beneath its foundations, and perform the circuit of its suburbs, are all full of passengers who never speak, who never look out of the window, who are always absorbed in reading. Even the young girls go to the office with a novel under their arm. The outside seats of the omnibuses resemble perambulating reading-rooms.

But what do they read?

The result of any inquiry made at the circulating libraries, those great purveyors of the intellectual food of the Anglo-Saxon public, shows that in comparison with other books novels are asked for in the proportion of a hundred to one. There are no less than thirty new novels published in the United Kingdom every week. Not more than five per cent of this astonishing output is sold direct to the public; the rest go into the circulating libraries. The most celebrated of these—Mudie's

—often buys on its own account the entire edition of a novel. But it is of course necessary that a novel should conform to the regulation standard: that it should be full of sentimentality, of complicated adventures and sensational episodes, that, above all, it should be outside and remote from life and reality. It is curious how the English, considered to be the most practical people on the face of the earth, should seek their mental nourishment in the perusal of the most improbable and fantastic of fables! The publishers too never lose sight of their “standard”: a really artistic novel will not sell; Hardy and Meredith will never make their fortunes. But the writers who possess, as they say in English publishing parlance, a “serviceable and dependable talent,” are eagerly sought for and lavishly remunerated for their work. For bringing Sherlock Holmes to life again and writing twelve further stories on his grotesque adventures, Conan Doyle pocketed the sum of £9000! And Sherlock Holmes, who enjoyed only too great a popularity in Italy also, furnishes an approximate idea of the character of the English popular novel. This is the only kind of stuff the “great British public” reads. John Morley recently remarked, in opening a public library at Woolwich, that in the course of his political peregrinations from one end of England to the other, he had had the opportunity of visiting many middle-class homes, and that everywhere he had been scandalized at the “shocking trumpery” he had seen upon his hosts’ bookshelves. Stories he had found of travel and adventure, magazines full of pseudo-science and frivolity, tales, and novels; but not one serious literary work on either history, economy,

philosophy, or sociology which would imply in its readers a definite tendency to study, a definite love of knowledge, or a definite interest in the problems of the day.

Not a fifth part of the number of books on economy or sociology that see the light in Italy is published in England. Herbert Spencer was and is far better known, and more widely studied, I will not say by ourselves, but by the Russians and Japanese, than by his own fellow-countrymen. I remember that when the great philosopher died the London papers devoted more space to the cabled reports of the Test Match between England and Australia, then being played at Adelaide, than to his own obituary notice. And a month after his death, on the publication of a letter in which Spencer expounded certain ideas on the dangers of the Occidentalization of the Japanese, *The Times* published a leading article, full of gall and bitterness, in which it compared the great thinker to a Chinese mandarin!

I have recalled the case of Spencer because his name and works are familiar to Italians, but I could mention living English historians, literary and scientific men, poets, and economists, who are far better known and more highly esteemed abroad than in their own country. English thinkers have no hold or influence upon the "great British public," which is only impressed by success in business, in politics, in sport, or on the music-hall stage! That public is too conceited and self-satisfied, too rich and fortunate, too fond of luxury and amusement, and too contented with its lot, to care unduly to tax its brains. It is only the discontented

who have any claim to intellectuality. An illuminating truth this, surely, for the editor of a certain London weekly review who, in order to stimulate the intellectuality of the country, offered a prize for "grumbling"! That prize, as far as I know, was never awarded.

Not one of the great questions which have agitated the Continent during the past fifty years has made an impression even skin-deep upon the "great British public." Is this for good or for evil? Is it fortunate or the reverse? I do not know: but this I do know, that young men coming to London from Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or Milan are all at first deeply impressed by this ignorance and indifference. Possibly this intellectual apathy of the British public is the secret of its social force. It has an instinctive distrust of all ideas, habits, and objects bearing a foreign stamp. When in 1903 the English Parliamentary representatives and their families were returning the visit of their French colleagues, they were everywhere received with enthusiasm, they were conducted on a triumphal tour through France, and were loaded with attentions and hospitality. At Bordeaux they were entertained at a banquet, at which were served wines of the oldest and choicest brands, jealously preserved in the cellars for half a century to grace high and special occasions: it was the choicest and most precious commodity that the inhabitants of Bordeaux had to offer, but these British senators politely asked for—whisky!

The true-born Briton may indeed hail with delight the *entente cordiale* with his neighbours across the Channel; he may run over to Paris every Saturday, and drag the sacred tradition of his Puritan Sabbath

through the mire in the *cabarets* of Montmartre ; he may even, in a generous holiday mood, tip the waiter at his café on the Boulevards with a franc, reflecting that, after all, a franc is less than a shilling ; but there are limits to his Continental flirtations. Have we not seen the plans for a Channel Tunnel shattered for the third or fourth time upon the impenetrable crust of his insular prejudices ?

These curious idiosyncrasies of the "great British public," this incapacity for feeling or appreciating serious and thoughtful art, this uniformity and banality of its tastes, are still more evident in the case of the drama than in that of fiction. If all realism and idealism are exiled from the "standard" literature of the "great British public" ; if the middle-class Englishman, when he buries himself on Sundays in his arm-chair and takes up a book, demands nothing more of his reading than that it shall prove a barren and harmless pastime ; so too, when he goes on a Saturday night to the theatre, having first fortified himself by a good dinner, he wants nothing higher or better than a gentle and pleasing titillation of the senses, just enough to assist, without overtaxing, his digestion.

It is maintained by some that this state of affairs is natural and excusable ; that the Briton leads a strenuous life, and after a fatiguing day in the City, his mind finds its natural and necessary recreation in the lightest and most frivolous types of entertainment. The simplest forms of amusement are those most suited to hard workers. Even the great Italian scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori, after bending all day in a library over the pages of his *Rerum Italicarum Scrip-*

tores, was wont to betake himself to the suburbs of Milan, and there seek relaxation at a puppet-show. Thus this contention may contain a certain amount of abstract truth, but I must be allowed to question its applicability to the case of the British playgoer. If the strenuous life implies the negation of every artistic sense, of any spirit of reflection, how can the contemporary German drama be explained? The German nation leads a no less strenuous life than the British; in fact, in workshops, banks, and in all other branches of trade and industry its activity is far more concentrated, more intense, and more silent than that displayed in England. And yet the drama which rouses Londoners to such a frantic pitch of enthusiasm is incomparably less serious, less consistent, and less artistic than that which holds the modern German stage—even in the theatres patronized by the masses. Thus it is not a question of a greater or less degree of strenuous application; rather is it a question of the general atmosphere in which the middle-class Briton has chosen to envelop himself.

But what can you expect? His habits are so mechanical, his life so easy, his mental processes so elementary and indolent, his critical faculties so obtuse, his morality so orthodox, and his spirit so egotistical, that he is devoid of all intellectual equipment for the comprehension of serious drama; he takes no interest in the reproduction of psychological difficulties which have never disturbed his own peace of mind; he is entirely without curiosity on the subject of social problems which have never preoccupied his own thoughts; he has no desire to understand and to pene-

trate the essential nature of the men and the things in the midst of which he moves as automatically, as unconsciously, as the wheel of a machine.

Hence it is no wonder that all that is artificial, absurd, commonplace, spectacular, and puerile is rampant upon the English stage; that theatrical wares are standardized like all other articles of trade; that musical farces, comedies, and plays are constructed each according to its own particular formula. The directors of the great circulating libraries at which theatre tickets also are sold, are frequently invited to the dress rehearsals of a musical comedy or a new dramatic work. They duly note whether the production corresponds to that given type or model which suits the taste of the "great British public"; if their opinion is favourable, they buy up the whole of the boxes, stalls, and circle for fifty, eighty, or a hundred performances—so certain are they of the success of the piece.

Whose is the blame? The public will always be supplied with the kind of drama it deserves, and the public which crowds the English theatres is composed, intellectually, of children.

"At *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* I happened to be in the last row of the stalls," wrote Arthur Symons, the cultured and highly-gifted critic of the *Academy*.¹ "My seat was not altogether well adapted for seeing and hearing the play, but it was admirably adapted for observing the pit, and I gave some of my attention to my neighbours there. Whenever a foolish joke was made on the stage, when Miss Julia Neilson, as Nell, the orange girl, stuttered with laughter or romped

¹ March 1st, 1902.

heavily across the stage, the pit thrilled and quivered with delight. At every piece of clowning there was the same responsive gurgle of delight. Tricks of acting so badly done that I should have thought a child would have seen through them, and resented them as an imposition, were accepted in perfect good faith, and gloated over. I was turning over the matter in my mind afterwards, when I remembered something that was said to me the other day by a young Swedish poet who is now in London. He told me that he had been to most of the theatres, and he had been surprised to find that the greater part of the pieces which were played at the principal London theatres were such pieces as would be played in Norway and Sweden at the lower-class theatres, and that nobody here seemed to mind. The English audience, he said, reminded him of a lot of children ; they took what was set before them with ingenuous good temper, they laughed when they were expected to laugh, cried when they were expected to cry. But of criticism, preference, selection, not a trace. He was amazed, for he had been told that London was a centre of civilization. Well, in future I shall try to remember, when I hear an audience clapping its hands wildly over some bad play, badly acted—it is all right, it is only the children."

CHAPTER II

REALISM AND THE ENGLISH DRAMA

“**A** NEW Drama or We Faint!” Such is the title of a little book printed in 1853, which one day, I scarcely know how, fell into my hands in the British Museum. If the later critics of the English stage have chanced to read it also, they will have certainly found in it some sources of consolation ; it seems, indeed, that the crisis lamented by them to-day dates from a long way back, and that the evil they deplore has some of its roots deep in the distant past.

For if we are to follow the pathetic picture drawn by the work in question, we shall have to call the nineteenth century in England a century of continuous dramatic failure. It is true that there were certain actors who gained individual distinction in their Shakespearean productions—such as were Kean, Macready, and later, Irving. But not a single author of real power in this direction, not a comedy nor tragedy worthy of note ever comes before us ; it is a desert, a void even more distressing than that which in Italy extends from Goldoni to Paolo Ferrari !

What, as a matter of fact, is there worthy to survive in the works of Bulwer Lytton, or of Tom Taylor, or

of Boucicault, or even of Tom Robertson, who was the best of them all? The national dramatic production, especially in the first half of the century, is a thing to awaken our pity. William Gifford, that first and most mordant editor of the *Quarterly Review*, gave his opinion, in 1810, as follows: "It seems as if all the idiots of the United Kingdom had combined together to write for the stage!" And in fact the only author, not an idiot as described, who then achieved success upon the English stage was—Scribe. He and his compatriots effected a peaceful invasion of England, and for years upon years nothing but French comedies were given in London and the provinces. It seemed quite an accepted thing that drama, like claret, should come from across the Channel. Even the theatres were baptized with French names: in the Strand was the "*Sans Pareil*" Theatre, and in Leicester Square the "*Sans Souci*."

My reader who wishes to pursue further this unhappy story of the English theatre may read with profit the work on this subject of Auguste Filon;¹ he will find both the book and its story most interesting. Filon, when he has cantered, with a delightful ease of style, through the dramatic wastes of the first seventy or even eighty years of the century, comes at last upon a little green oasis.

The finely combative criticism of William Archer, the interest aroused by Ibsen's works—revealed in some measure to the English public by Edmund Gosse—the daring initiative of the actor Tree; the appearance of such works as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Saints*

¹ A. Filon, *Le Théâtre Anglais*. Paris, Calman Lévy, 1896.

and Sinners, the institution of the Independent Theatre—all these fresh elements were sprouting together in this green oasis, and seemed to be the germs of a new and promising artistic growth.

At last, "*Il y a un théâtre anglais!*" But the critic who wrote these words had spoken too soon. Eight years later all the hopes with which he had closed his book had vanished into air; as he sadly recognized his error, he turned the words with which he had welcomed this new-born art of the theatre into its funeral oration! "*Le drame anglais, à peine né, se meurt.*"¹

The fact is, that the poor thing was still-born. A drama cannot live, grow, and flourish save when it draws its nutriment from actual life; save when it is true in its substance, personal in its observation, sincere in its expression. And all this is precisely what was wanting in the compositions of these playwrights who had inspired such hopes in Filton; what they lacked was actuality, truth and sincerity.

Never shall I forget some of the first impressions of my stay in London. Alone, in the midst of five millions of men!—and these men the least expressive and the least communicative in the world—without friends, without acquaintances, ignorant of the very language of the country, I long remained under the incubus of the unknown, that most terrible, most exhausting and most enervating of all problems. London was for me a great Sphinx, as monstrous as it was hostile!

Not only were all the doors closed to me—but I could read no answer in the eyes, the soul, the life of this countless multitude. All seemed to me so different—so

¹ *Journal des Débats.* April 27th, 1904.

painfully different—from what I had imagined ! And I remember that in my struggle to form some idea of these people, into whose midst I had come, I bethought myself of visiting the theatre. And I did so faithfully for two months ; but, alas ! I found that if I wished to ever understand the English I must find some other method.

For instead of seeing reproduced upon the stage—as I had flattered myself that I should do—the characters, the specific types, the passions and manners of the country, I saw only there old scenic tricks which were long familiar to me—sensational intrigues, impossible situations, men and women who could have been neither English nor French nor Italian. It all appeared to me mannered, false, sentimental, melodramatic, without any accent of truth, without any touch of original colour, without a single real sensation ! And after an act or two of such plays as these, I experienced an irresistible impulse to escape from that artificial atmosphere, to get out into the street—and to breathe again !

What mattered it if there I found the yellow fog, the black smoke, the wearisome, hurrying crowd of passers-by ; at any rate this was the real, living crowd, anonymous and inscrutable—the hideous often close beside the beautiful, the magnificence jostling the grotesque squalor of the huge city. Thus I came back to that overpowering and exasperating pulsation of this great unknown world, which tortured while it fascinated me ; and there at any rate was life, life in its full power, the life in all its intensity that surged around me on every side.

From the street to the boards of the stage is after all but a few steps, but it is as if one had crossed the Great Wall of China. For the English stage is apart from and outside of English life. The novelist, the poet, the painter, the journalist may live to a greater or less extent within this life, may record its echoes, may give out its impressions—but not so the playwright. This marvellous Imperial society, Mistress of the World and itself slave of its own weaknesses, this society which is at once so great and so small, with its countless cross-currents of conflicting interests, its own hidden storms of opposing passions, this society so full of contrasts and contradictions, of grandeur and worthlessness, of splendid virtues and sordid vices, of riches and misery, of the extremes of vulgarity and refinement—this society so fascinating from its very complexity, this world within a world—does not exist for the English stage !

No ! this very London, I repeat, where life pours forth its power in great floods, rises and falls, struggles and rests, triumphs and curses, sneers and smiles—Life in all its pathos, in all its beauty, in all its filth and horrors—this City of Paradoxes where the real has always something of the fantastic, and the hideous something of the beautiful—this Enchantress London, who ends by bewitching even those who have most detested her—has not been found worthy of a place within the English theatre ! Instead of this, what do we find depicted upon the English stage ? The squabbles of provincial life, conventionalized members of the aristocracy, romantic melodrama, drawing-room intrigues . . . and a nauseous hash-up of mis-

represented history and exaggerated sentimentality, which is as false to art as it is false to life and history.

And yet a whole band of good fellows and of brave leaders works and fights for this theatre—A. W. Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, J. M. Barrie, A. Sutro, Sydney Grundy, G. R. Sims, R. C. Carton, Haddon Chambers, H. V. Esmond, H. H. Davies, Anthony Hope, Captain Robert Marshall, Captain Basil Hood, etc. etc. There is one—whose name I have left among the “et ceteras”—who has generally an advertisement in the first page of the *Playhouse* of his “new plays always ready for stars or managers” (please note, dear reader, the alternative!). A good fellow he too as well, and—perhaps—a good writer. For it is not ability which is lacking to this crowd of dramatists, nor yet technical knowledge, nor even wit, nor mastery of stagecraft. Far from it! One of William Archer's most brilliant critical studies is on the “Curse of Cleverness.” No, the trouble is that in their hurry to be clever, to be ingenious in their plots and witty in their dialogue, in their zeal to work “for stars and managers,” one gets the impression that these dramatic authors have forgotten that in writing for the theatre it is also possible, incidentally, to be writing for art. The loss is all the greater, because some among them are undoubtedly gifted with excellent qualities.

Take, for instance, Henry Arthur Jones.

Jones is, above all else, the dramatist of good intentions and good claims to our regard. He is English *de pure race*: he comes from the very centre of England, from the neighbourhood of Birmingham; he enjoys a good position, and is in his fifty-fifth year—

all of which amounts to saying that he has not yet ceased to write for the theatre, to pocket his fees, or to indulge in some strong comments when he opens his *Times* the morning after one of his "first nights."

For Walkley, the critic of the great London paper, has never been willing to take him seriously ; and this to poor Jones's extreme annoyance. Once he even lost his patience, and went so far as to close the door of his theatre in Mr. Walkley's face ; there followed an exchange of furious letters, a polemic in all the daily papers, a literary uproar and squabble which made the public merry for some weeks. But we won't speak of this now ; for now we must be careful how we criticize the good intentions and claims of Henry Arthur Jones !

This cultured, intelligent, and prolific dramatist has published several writings in the reviews, and also in a work on "The Renascence of the Drama," and has given many lectures on the conditions of the English stage. And his essays and critical lectures, though somewhat emphatic in their utterance, are full of judicious observations. The stage—he tell us—should depict society as it is, should study and reproduce all its manifestations, should depict all its classes, and occupy itself with all its problems. Nothing should be forbidden to its study and its presentment—neither religion, nor politics, nor morals. The stage should become realist in the sense that it should give us a faithful picture of life, and a picture which should have a critical and educational value.

Agreed ! And it was in reading some of these essays that I myself became seized with a keen interest

in the dramatic work of Mr. H. A. Jones; for if this author only put into practice his own critical theories, we should certainly possess in him a really great dramatist. But, alas! to criticize is one thing, and it is quite another to perform: the road which leads to the footlights is paved with just the same good intentions as a certain other road which we have all heard of. I find it quite impossible to forgive to Mr. Jones as author the disillusionment which has been caused by Mr. Jones as critic.

In a quarter of a century he has written from twenty to twenty-five comedies and dramas. Their titles give some idea of their subjects, and are themselves excellent, as for instance: *The Crusaders*, *Judah*, *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, *Saints and Sinners*, *The Triumph of the Philistines*, *The Liars*, *The Dancing Girl*, etc. Do not these suggest to our thoughts a broad and ample "contents," a picture of contemporary English society, an analytic method of observation combined with a philosophic purpose in the subject? Jones—we should be inclined to assume—is a realist.

As a matter of fact there are realistic elements scattered through his works for the theatre—elements collected with rare keenness of observation, and rendered with real vigour of touch. Were we to glean these from his plays and put them all together, I doubt not but we could form an interesting collection of types and characters.

But with all this incidental realism he has not given us a single realistic play. And the reason of this is easy to find. The realistic elements which Jones undoubtedly does bring upon the stage are spoilt by him

when they get there by the atmosphere of restraint with which he surrounds them, and by the rhetorical methods of his dialogue. Mr. Jones, unluckily, can never quite escape from the bad influences of his early training. He commenced his theatre work by writing melodramas and, what is more, melodramas with a strongly sensational seasoning ; and he has never been able to really lighten his touch. His theatrical creations lack refinement and finish ; and the same may be said of his plots and situations. We feel in his work almost always the hand of the artist—but of an artist who is incomplete, who remains, so to speak, embryonic.

Let us analyse briefly one of his first and most successful comedies, *Saints and Sinners*, produced at the Vaudeville in 1884. Nothing could be more felicitous than the subject—which is a study of middle-class bigotry and of Anglo-Saxon Puritanism—a picture of provincial society, with all its hypocrisy and all its little meannesses—in a word, the surroundings, in many respects, of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*.

Fletcher, a Nonconformist minister, a good, simple fellow, who gives all he has to the poor, and whose life is divided between sermons and charity, is in difficulties with certain members of his dissenting congregation. He is trustee for the property of some poor orphans, and a speculator—who is also one of the most devout attendants at his chapel—wishes to get his signature to a contract which would result in their complete ruin. The minister, warned in good time of the game that is afoot, refuses his consent, and even rejects with scorn the money which has been intended to overcome his

scruples. Hoggard—the speculator, but also a pillar of this congregation—vows vengeance against the minister, and intrigues to drive him from his post. Nor does he find it difficult to gain adherents to his plot. Prabble, for instance, the local chemist, is furious with Fletcher because the latter will never consent to denounce from the pulpit the Co-operative Stores, which are forcing Prabble to reduce his prices.

Their chance of vengeance is not slow in coming. The minister has a daughter, Letty, who has been led astray by a handsome captain, and has fled with him to London. Her poor father knows all, but keeps his own counsel in the matter, for fear of creating a scandal and completing his daughter's ruin. He always hopes that she will return to him; and one day, after a month of suffering, having discovered where she is, he hastens to her, forgives her wrong-doing, tears her away from her seducer, and brings her back home. What a magic in that word "*home*"—which for her means the return to the quiet, good, and virtuous life she had left.

In the little town no one has even a suspicion of her escapade; in the Chapel both father and daughter can still hold their heads high. But they have been reckoning without Hoggard. The very first Sunday after the return of this lost sheep the man of business calls the man of God aside into the vestry, and offers him the choice, either to sign that contract or—a scandal, and the loss of his living. For if the minister still refuses his signature, then Hoggard will enter into the Chapel, where the congregation is assembled to hear the sermon, and will reveal to them himself the

story of Letty's shame. But the good pastor does not hesitate in this crisis ; in him the Christian is even stronger than the father. Not only does he refuse his consent to the vile offer, but he steps boldly out to the entrance of the Chapel and, holding his daughter in his arms, makes public confession with his own lips to his flock of the whole sad story. Every time that the poor fellow pauses, overcome by the grief and shame of his own confession, Letty—who has repented, and who finds even a sort of relief to her conscience in this public confession of her wrong-doing—gives him fresh courage, and cries to him : “ Go on, go on, papa ! ”

It is a magnificent scene this—which closes a drama carried through up to this moment with some stage devices, it is true, but with far more real sincerity of expression, and besides this with a complete and felicitous rendering of the different characters, and with a most mordant and effective picture of a narrow circle—nay more, of a whole little world of small meannesses which hide behind the mask of assumed religious fervour. The play ought, in fact, to end at the point we have described. But Jones must needs add a fifth act to let us know that Letty's betrayer, the captain, has been killed in India, that the rascally financier has gone bankrupt and is “ wanted ” by the police, that Letty's character has been completely redeemed, and that the good minister, after four years of abject poverty, is about to return to his Chapel at the express request of his old dissenting flock.

This is an act useless, falsely romantic from start to finish, which destroys the whole impression of the

work, and betrays the heavy hand of the earlier author of melodrama. But the real study of life, with H. A. Jones, is always thrown overboard in this very way. When once he has got a clear vision of a character or situation, instead of following out its development to the logical conclusion, whether it be pleasant or the reverse, Jones seems always tempted to smooth it down or else to patch it up somehow—to take off the hard angles, and bring it all down to the same comfortable level. And this treatment often amounts to a defect. Between Henry Arthur Jones and a high level of art this patchwork asserts its unwelcome presence.

Now let us take another of his comedies, one of the latest and the best—perhaps, indeed, the very best—that he has written. *The Liars* does really seek to be a true and genuine study of contemporary life and character. And in fact both the characters and situations are handled with entire mastery—the surroundings given to perfection. Here we really see the types of the English upper middle-class—rich, idle, frivolous, fond of pleasure. Here, in Lady Jessica Nepean, we get the very image of a certain class of London society woman—frivolous, witty, empty-headed, in a manner depraved without ever being actually immoral—a creature who does not realize that for a woman it is quite as dangerous to play with her independence as it would be for her to play with fire. Lady Jessica has for her husband the indifference and contempt of her class. The women of the “smart set”—one of the class which we, with an expression no longer used in England, are wont to call the “high life”—are brought up to see and enjoy life on its witty side, and Lady

Jessica cannot tolerate her husband because he is incapable of seeing a joke. She prefers Falkner, a brilliant officer, who has rendered good service in Africa to the Empire, and who pays her devoted attention. When this husband gets jealous and threatens to make a scene, this is what Lady Jessica calmly replies:—

Lady Jessica. Mr. Falkner is very deeply attached to me, I believe.

Gilbert. He has told you so?

Lady Jessica. No.

Gilbert. No?

Lady Jessica. No; but that's only because I keep on stopping him.

Gilbert. You keep on stopping him?

Lady Jessica. Yes; it's so much pleasanter to have him dangling for a little while, and then . . .

Gilbert. Then what?

Lady Jessica. Well, it is pleasant to be admired.

Gilbert. And you accept his admiration?

Lady Jessica. Of course I do. Why shouldn't I? If Mr. Falkner admires me, isn't that the greatest compliment he can pay to your taste? And if he spares you the drudgery of being polite to me, flattering me, complimenting me, and paying me the hundred delicate little attentions that win a woman's heart, I'm sure you ought to be very much obliged to him for taking all that trouble off your hands.

In this short scene of dialogue there is luminously sketched out all the conjugal psychology of the "smart set." For the English married woman of the idle and vicious upper middle-class really uses this language; and in fact echoes of it are frequently to be heard in the Divorce Court. You may admire her frankness and, if you are cynically inclined, may add

in your own thoughts that there are other wives who add deceit to betrayal. And your view might be correct if the third person concerned really counted for something with Lady Jessica and those like her. But Lady Jessica—at any rate when she is using this language to her husband—is not in love with Falkner. She does not claim, like an Ibsenite heroine, the right to love and to be loved, but merely that of flirting—of being surrounded by admirers who are longing for her. The right to flirt is Article I in the conjugal Code of the “smart set”; and the husbands have just got to accept it—all the more so if they happen to be idiots who cannot grasp a joke !

All these refinements of the feminine psychology of a certain class in England, Jones has studied and rendered with success. And Lady Jessica is perfectly in character when—in Act II—having gone, with supreme carelessness, to an hotel on the Thames to dine *tête-à-tête* with Falkner, she is surprised by the brother of her husband. Falkner is delighted with the *dénouement*, because he hopes that it will decide Lady Jessica to yield to his love—to give herself to him, to fly together. . . . But is he out of his senses? . . . We now hear Lady Jessica speaking to him with the same arguments which she had just before been using to her husband. . . . She does not want a scandal—she will even hate Falkner himself if he does not do all that is in his power to avoid it. . . . She does not want to leave her friends—male and female—her little amusements, her position and habits of life for . . . What! . . . Love?! . . . And Falkner, with all her friends—male and female—must now accordingly exert themselves to

save her—to take in her husband, to get him to believe that the dinner was not really to have been *tête-à-tête* between her and Falkner. For the women it is as good fun as a wedding—or better. Each one invents a finer lie than the other, and the men do their best to back them up. To one of them, who has moral scruples, who objects to lies because (he says) he is an honest man, Sir Christopher, the only philosopher of the whole party, observes : “ So are we all—all honourable men ! But the trouble is that ever since the days of Eden the women have always found some way of putting us in the dilemma of either opposing the truth, or of opposing them. . . . ”

However, on this occasion, as on so many others, the men prefer to oppose the truth, until chance takes it into its head to unravel all this fine tissue of lies, and to confirm the husband’s suspicions. Here it is that the play, which seemed to be going to continue as a good and clever study of contemporary life and character, becomes involved in a complex plot, and ends—who would believe it if he did not know that blessed tendency of Jones !—in a dramatic situation which is almost melodramatic.

Lady Jessica, we know not how, finds herself, in the midst of all these lies and contradictions, to have fallen really in love, and is about to take the fatal step of flying with Falkner, if Sir Christopher—always witty but also always wise—did not convince both her and him that these solutions don’t do in England. “ *It won’t work!* ”—that’s all ! The moral side of the question is not here approached at all ; and Sir Christopher has too much tact, and has himself im-

bibed too strongly the social precepts of his class to ever bring it forward. He simply says: “*It won’t work!*” You can’t go about it that way. It’s not the right thing : it’s not correct form. “You know what we English are, Ned. We’re not a bit better than our neighbours ; but, thank God ! we do pretend we are, and we do make it hot for anybody who disturbs that holy pretence. . . .”

What a pity that a playwright who knows his compatriots as well as this sentence shows, cannot succeed in presenting them with equal truth upon the stage !

Will Alfred Sutro succeed any better? Sutro is a rising star—young, industrious, passionately fond of the theatre. It was he who popularized Maeterlinck’s work in England with some excellent translations ; and one fine day he decided on writing an original work, and put his hand to a psychological comedy, *The Cave of Illusion*, in four acts. He knocked at the doors of managers, of actor-managers, even of managerial restaurant-proprietors—but always knocked in vain. Not a single door even moved on its hinges. Great Scott ! Who was this troublesome fellow ?

Then he gave up the managerial doorstep, and tried publishing his own plays. The critics gave him a friendly pat on the back, but the publisher sold rather less than two hundred copies. The complaint seemed to be that the play was not “cheerful”—that it ended badly ! Sutro, getting impatient, wrote another play, and this time gave it a pleasant conclusion. *The Walls of Jericho* was put on the stage and had a success—a genuine success, in fact the only notable theatrical success of the year 1904.

The Walls of Jericho is first and foremost a satire on the “smart set.” Its plot shows an Australian millionaire marrying a young girl, whose family are titled, fashionable, and have their residence in Mayfair. He is a good, straightforward sort of fellow, who has made his fortune in the Colonies, where he has hitherto lived and worked, quite outside this atmosphere of effeminacy and dissipation. She, on the other hand, is a London woman absolutely “up-to-date”—a creature without sex and without passions, who smokes cigarettes, plays bridge, flirts—and neglects her children. The contrast between these two could not well be greater; but the discord which soon asserts itself ends with the victory of the simple, strong man over this vitiating butterfly. A threadbare theme, you may remark! Yes! but Sutro has brought into it a portion of an actual existing life, and with all this a healthy moral lesson. The public crowded to see the play from curiosity. A morning paper, the *Daily Express*, at once commenced a series of letters: “What does the public think of it? Are we really so bad as all this? Is our society really so morbid, sickly, effeminate? Hasn’t the author a little over-drawn his picture?” In a word, the play raised quite a stir, and the author’s name soon became known upon both sides of the Atlantic.

Alas! I am inclined to fear that success has somewhat spoilt this author, or that it has at least inspired him with a dangerous inclination towards the commercial drama. At any rate, it is a fact that his subsequent works, *Mollentrave on Women*, *The Perfect Lover*, and *John Glayde's Honour*, have not by any means con-

firmed the hopes conceived by some critics. Of these three plays, *John Glayde's Honour* had a tremendous success; but it appeared to me artificial, exaggerated, and imbued with that universal defect of contemporary English drama—a want of realism in the study of characters and situations. Walkley, in his criticism of this play, expressed one sentiment which gave me the impression that English dramatists, as a rule, esteem it a merit rather than a defect to give a wide berth to realism, and that they therefore do it on purpose. “Astute English playwrights,” said the eminent critic, “know better than to give the theatrical public scrupulously truthful studies. They know, as Bacon knew, that ‘a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.’ As Canning called in the New World to redress the balance of the Old, so the dramatist calls in fiction to redress the balance of fact. And that is one reason why some people call all art a Fool’s Paradise.” In *John Glayde's Honour* Sutro has shown himself extremely “astute,” and nothing more.

Another young author, of a temperament totally different to that of Sutro, but who when he writes plays takes leave of realism outside the theatre doors—wishing it good night with a smile half-malicious, half-ingenuous—is J. M. Barrie.

Barrie is a most curious phenomenon of artistic psychology: to me he has the appearance, from this point of view, of a boy who having reached a certain age has stopped there, and decided that he will absolutely decline to grow any further. In the world of letters he has always remained an *enfant prodige*—and this in spite of his forty-seven summers past and gone.

J. M. Barrie was, in fact, born in Scotland on May 9th, 1860. If you wish to consult his genealogical tree, to know the name of his nurse, the adventures of his childhood, his favourite sports, his early studies, his first steps in a journalistic career, in novel-writing, or theatre work, you have only to procure the biography which Mr. Hammerton has written, and your ignorance will be enlightened.

In England there is no need to die in order to fall into the biographer's clutches. You have only to be a little before the public—be it in politics, in business, or in art—and you are certain to find your Plutarch. The “great British public” is worse than a village gossip; it wants to know all the private history of its politicians, its writers, and its playwrights. You have only to tell it that So-and-so has been in his time in the Eleven at Oxford, or has rowed upon the Thames in the winning 'Varsity crew, that some one else of interest prefers golf to cricket, that the well-known writer X. has a great passion for motoring, and that Colonel G. has always had a weakness for music—and you will have gone far to satisfy its (of course, purely intellectual) curiosity. Winston Churchill, who has been war correspondent, novelist, author of more serious works, *enfant prodige* of politics, opponent of Chamberlain, member of Parliament, and is now Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, has—at little more than thirty years of age—his biography of 340 full pages!

Still, even admitting all this, I must confess that I have not read Barrie's biography; in fact, I have only read one and a half of his stories. Granted that they are very pretty, they are really so sentimental! But

Barrie, you may reply, is also a humorist. Yes! but he is a humorist that we Latins cannot understand. At Edinburgh they describe his *genre* with a word which is for me untranslatable—"pawky" humour; in London they call it, less appreciatively, "dry" humour. The fact is that it is really and simply Scotch humour; and to understand it—so subtle are its points—a special education is required. But the Scotch simply glory in it—and even more still do they glory in their Barrie! They will certainly one of these days erect a monument to him at Kirriemuir, if not a statue—within his lifetime—in their University of Edinburgh. And this will be quite fair, because Barrie owes a part of his success to his birthplace. A Scotchman, said Samuel Johnson, even before he publishes a book or produces a play, has always five hundred of his fellow-countrymen ready to applaud him; and though more than a century has passed since the famous Doctor's dictum, the "clan" has not ceased to exist.

This existence makes itself especially felt in art and in literature. I have never in my life heard such bad accounts of the painters, sculptors, and writers of England as in one evening in which I was the guest of an artists' club at Glasgow. Munich is proud of having discovered the "Glasgow School"; but I will answer for it that the discovery did not present any very serious difficulties! These worthy artists, who have brought back into fashion moonlight effects and the subdued poetry of the melancholy northern landscape, may have all the good qualities that can be imagined—save that of the modest violet. They don't hide their virtues; they even put them before us with a frankness which

has its own charm. On the great stage of the world they see mirrored—themselves! Ben Nevis takes the place of Helicon. In painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, novel-writing, we must drink of the Highland springs, we must return *ad integros fontes—Caledonios*. Scotland for ever!

Yet those who know Barrie personally assert that his modesty is one of his greatest charms; and this must be an added charm for a native of Kirriemuir. Let us keep it in our minds when we also keep before us his taste in literature, his refined feeling, and his almost infantile vein of mirth. For the theatre Barrie has written several plays, some of which have had a great success—such as *The Little Minister*, *The Wedding Guest*, *The Admirable Crichton*, *Little Mary*, etc. The title of this last scenic joke (I will not say allegorical play, in spite of its veiled and serious hygienic contention) has now become a part of the popular vocabulary—to the no small disgust of Miss Marie Corelli, who takes such a firm stand on behalf of the proprieties and refinements of the language!

But Barrie in his dramatic works has not alone been concerned with the nation's health—threatened, it would seem, by a too vigorous appetite. Take another of his plays, *The Admirable Crichton*. There we find all the elements required for a good character play that shall be at the same time witty and instructive. Lord Loam is a Liberal peer; and he wishes to give proof of his Liberalism not only in the gilded chamber of his equals in rank, but also in his own family. Democracy has different effects on different people; and unlike the nobleman who was quite willing to place himself

beneath the very poor, but firmly declined to remain on their level, Lord Loam treats his servants with familiarity, and from time to time takes tea with them at the same table. This behaviour exasperates not only his daughters (especially the haughty Lady Mary) but even his butler Crichton, who holds to his own philosophy on this point, and considers, as one of its axioms, that in this world—where inequality seems to be a kind of natural law—the difference of classes should be scrupulously observed.

But Lord Loam is a “crank” on this point, and must be allowed his own way. Now it happens that one fine day, while crossing the ocean in his yacht, the noble lord is victim of a shipwreck, and succeeds with difficulty in escaping to the shelter of a desert island along with his daughter Mary, her cousin, the scullery-maid (or, to give her her exact title, the “tweeny”)—and Crichton.

Now it is that the admirable qualities of Crichton really come to the surface. In this desert island the butler becomes another Robinson Crusoe; when the others are crushed by their misfortunes, he alone turns his native ingenuity to account in finding out a way to feed, clothe, and house the whole shipwrecked party. So that their positions become now reversed; but the butler’s philosophy triumphs by showing yet again that inequality is a law of nature. In London the title carried the day, and in the desert island the brains. But, all the same, there had in both places alike to be the ruler and the ruled. And Crichton now becomes the head, the Lord, the King of this little realm: Lord Loam is reduced to the position of a servant; his

cousin, in spite of his rank as Honourable, turns out a very useful mechanic ; and Lady Mary, who in London faded in the artificial atmosphere of drawing-rooms, becomes here an intrepid huntress, full of vigour and life. All the party meanwhile respect and obey Crichton ; and Mary falls in love with him !

But the arrival of a British warship interrupts the incipient idyll. When the officers and bluejackets land, Lord Loam goes to meet them with all the dignified gratitude of an English peer, and resumes his position at the head of the party.

In the last act we find them all back in Mayfair. Crichton is once more an everyday butler ; Lady Mary remembers with a shudder that moment of weakness on the island, and tries to efface its memory by becoming engaged to a lord ; the Honourable cousin writes a book in which he attributes to himself the success of the whole adventure, and merely mentions Crichton, in a footnote, as a useful auxiliary ! But, even so, the poor butler's presence becomes insupportable, and every one rejoices when they hear that he has decided to marry the cook, and open a bar in the Harrow Road. Yet, as he makes his exit, Lady Mary, in saying good-bye to him, adds : "Ah, Crichton, you are really the best of us all !" "Yes," replies the philosophic butler, "the best in the island, but certainly not the best in England !" And Lady Mary, after a moment's thought, arrives at the conclusion that—"This is perhaps a great evil for England !"

And this, we too think, might be the moral of the play ; but as a matter of fact neither the thought which inspires it nor the artistic treatment make a really good

play of *The Admirable Crichton*, and "this," we may add, "is perhaps a great evil for the theatre." Barrie had here a fairly good subject, good situations and characters; but he has spoilt it all with an element of burlesque. The second and third acts on the desert island, where Crichton goes so far as to set up electric light, come very near to pantomime. At that point, that unconquerable juvenility of Barrie, of which I spoke, has got the better of him. For this reason he is at his best and produces really charming work when—like a Scotch Hans Andersen—he writes direct for children. *Peter Pan*, a Fantasy in three acts, was put on the stage on Boxing Day of 1904, with all the season's pantomimes—and is a little jewel. But with fancies of this kind we get away from the field of drama into that of Gilbertian comedy, in which Gilbert himself has shown—at 77 years of age—that he can still improve upon himself!

Ah, but with Gilbert there is no question of whether his humour is "pawky," or merely "dry"! It did one good to see with what rapture the London public welcomed the other day the announcement of another of his dramatic absurdities—after so many years of silence. "A new play by Mr. W. S. Gilbert," wrote Walkley in *The Times*. "There is a thrill in the very phrase. It is as though some one announced the discovery of a thirteenth book of some comic 'Æneid,' or the lost arm (in plaster) of the Venus in the Louvre. For Mr. Gilbert has become a quasi-classic in his own lifetime. We have all grown accustomed to regarding his dramatic work in the light in which we view a public monument, as some-

thing of historic interest, a permanent and unalterable possession."

The humorist of those fanciful dances and delightful scenes of fairyland, the famous librettist of Sullivan (with whom his name will be always as inseparably united as those of Meilhac and Halévy with the name of Offenbach), the delightful author of *The Mikado* and all the burlesque repertory of "The Savoy," had for a long time practically retired from the English stage, living a quiet country life at Harrow, among the roses beside the little lake, with his cage of monkeys and his Egyptian tent, at his beautiful home—Grimsdyke.

But in the peaceful retirement of his country retreat the fancy of Gilbert remained as fresh and youthful as ever; and we saw proof of this when his *Harlequin and the Fairy's Dilemma* was produced with distinct success on May 3rd, 1904, at the Garrick Theatre. Rosebud is a good fairy, for the time being out of work. Her special line—her "business"—is that of uniting young lovers; but since the times are bad, and loves—the true loves—are few and far between, Rosebud is in danger of losing her place, and of being set back in the last rank—that of the fat fairies, whom the gods have placed to board out. To escape such an unhappy fate, Rosebud invokes the aid of the Demon Alcohol, with whose assistance she hopes to find out some lovers, to unite them, and so to keep her place on the active list without any fears as to a reduced salary! The Fairy and the Demon soon get to work; but, amusing as it might prove, we must not accompany them here through their wanderings and adventures. I only wish here to mention *The Fairy's Dilemma*—one

of the wittiest productions of recent years—because, as *The Times'* critic has truly remarked, Gilbert has become almost a classic in England; but one whose work, brilliant, humorous, interesting, and artistic as it always is, does not really belong to the theatre of the drama.

No, the only playwright of the contemporary English stage who possesses—in spite of his defects—some sense of realism is Pinero.

Arthur Wing Pinero—in spite of his name and Portuguese descent—is a Londoner *pur sang*. His father was a solicitor, and would have preferred to see his son, too, enter the legal profession. But the young Arthur at seventeen years of age said good-bye to his parents' deeds and conveyances, and enrolled himself for a pound a week in a dramatic company at Edinburgh. After a year's apprenticeship, the Theatre Royal of the Scottish modern Athens took fire, and Pinero went to another theatre at Liverpool, and thence later to the Globe in London.

In 1876 he entered, with a five years' contract, into Irving's company at the Lyceum; but he seemed to have mistaken his vocation. He was an extremely bad actor. Once a Birmingham critic told him frankly that his Claudius in *Hamlet* was the most wicked King that the fellow-citizens of Chamberlain had ever seen.

All the same, it was not only to succeed as an actor that he had abandoned the paternal office. His ambition had been always to write plays. He commenced accordingly in 1877 with some curtain-lifters—£200 a Year, *Daisy's Escape*, and *Bygones*—which brought him in £50, and the acquaintance of Miss Myra Holme

—a clever and charming actress who later was to become his wife.

Irving, too, encouraged him to go on ; there was good stuff in him. Then it was that Pinero definitely abandoned the stage as a performer and gave himself heart and soul, with great faith in himself, great patience and persistent labour, to write comedies, farces, and dramas.

He has now passed his fiftieth year and counts to his credit thirty-six works in all—some more successful than others. He is by this time immensely rich, and has a house in one of the most aristocratic quarters of London ; he pockets more than £20,000 a year out of his author's fees ; he travels, spends the summer in Norway or Switzerland or Italy, amuses himself with sport, goes into society, is to be seen at clubs, at receptions, and social gatherings, where his presence is keenly sought, and where he finds the types and situations of his plays.

To see him you would never guess who or what he is. He has all the quiet, well-groomed air of a well-to-do private gentleman ; and his clean-shaven face with the eyes small and black as coal, with the overhanging thick eyebrows, in spite of the advantage which the caricaturists have drawn from them, have not—luckily for him !—the stereotyped expression of an inspired artist ! But come to talk with him—and you will soon notice the quiet and subtle perception of a refined humorist and scholar. As playwright the English are justly proud of Pinero, and place him in the front rank, though they do not always agree in their criticism of his work. The *Quarterly Review* for instance—that

review whose style is almost as weighty as its matter—finds in him an echo of Cervantes—something of the “old Spanish type”: there is something in him of Ibsen, say others, and yet others again—if you scratch your Pinero you will find Labiche, or Dumas, or Donnay. . . .

In Italy, Pinero is best of all known as author of *La seconda moglie* (*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*). But in the Anglo-Saxon world he owes his celebrity to his farces, or at any rate to productions of a similar nature, for which it would be difficult to find another name, although this does not fit them exactly.

For they are not really farces or *pochades*, or brilliant scenes of comedy; they are not the buffooneries of the Adelphi Theatre or of the Palais Royal; they have rather the situations of farce—the characters of comedy. Pinero himself has wished to explain their character as follows. Our epoch, he has said, is pre-eminently an age of sentiment, in which the playwright is of necessity compelled to seek his humour in the exaggeration of sentiment—to present *probable* types in *possible* circumstances, but from a point of view which exaggerates their sentiments and magnifies their weaknesses. However this may be, the impression left on my own mind is that this is more a degeneration of the *comédie de mœurs* than an ennobling of farce, properly so called; and, as a matter of fact, in *The Schoolmistress*, in *Dandy Dick*, in *The Cabinet Minister*, in *The Magistrate* the element of farce comes very close in many points to nature. Still, their success was as great in England and in America (where the Boston Museum included *The Cabinet Minister* in its classical

repertory of plays) as in Germany and Austria (where *The Magistrate* is still constantly performed under the title of *Die Blaue Grotte*).

Almost at the same time as these farces he was writing serious drama and comedies of sentiment, such as *Sweet Lavender* and *The Profligate*; and even in the whole of his later creations you will note this alternation of serious and of lighter works. Therefore it is quite wrong to speak of the "different manners" in the art of Pinero, since in his mental activity there are not distinct phases or fresh departures—just as there is no artist who does not try in different ways the entire and final expression of his temperament. This gradual development of Pinero simply means a gradual advance of the craftsman towards the perfect in his craft. And, in fact, after these preliminary dramas of sentiment and these earlier farces, he has found this expression in his masterpiece—*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—which we all know and admire; but then, yet again, after this powerful and sincere work, which seemed to mark an advance towards a high and intellectual range of art, he has turned back to give us a farce like *The Amazons*. Just in the same way, after *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, he has written *The Princess and the Butterfly*, and after *Iris* and *Letty* there came a brilliant scene of farce—*The Wife without a Smile*.

This capricious versatility of humour and of psychological interest seems to indicate that the force of Pinero is not purely intellectual; and in fact the charm of his works does not really emanate from their thought, as is the case in the plays of Ibsen, Hauptmann, and Sudermann.

If you come to analyse his plays in order to find in them a central idea, you will find that he has very little to tell you that is new, original, or interesting. Or else, what he has to tell you about men and things he tells you from the point of view of a casual observer, not of a thinker who has a whole scheme of thought to demonstrate or to define ; he gives you psychology—but it is psychology condensed into epigrams ! Out of his plays one might easily collect (as, in fact, Miss Myra Hamilton has already done) a book of clever sayings—but never a complete, broad, and yet individual conception of any social or psychological problem.

His power is thus entirely emotional. For, if he does not think, he feels intensely with his characters ; and this explains to us how he has excelled as much in farce as in drama, since he always penetrates and lives within the life of his scenic creations, grasping and following out, by a highly refined sensibility, all the most delicate, the most uncertain phases of the soul's emotions—whether it is laughter that claims the momentary sway, or grief. The success of his farces and his dramatic works to me seems to lie just here—in those characters which are so human, so true, so intimately felt ; and not in the *dénouement* of the plot, or in the development of any theory of life.

Yet if Pinero has hitherto refused to give himself to any one *genre*, his genius and his temperament are better in evidence in the comedy of real life and of character, than in farce and drama. In the spring of 1899 he produced at the old Globe Theatre a work which created a great stir in England, but which in

Italy was never even given a chance. An unlucky person who had the unfortunate idea of making an Italian version of this play was told by authors and critics (many of them his intimate friends), and by actors and actresses, that the play was obviously ridiculous, and before an Italian public would invite certain failure! After one or two rehearsals the "author's copy" was put quietly to bed—and I imagine that by this time the rats have ended its slumbers by using it for their breakfast.

But who knows if it really would have been such a failure after all! Certainly *The Gay Lord Quex* is a play distinctively English in its surroundings and its characters, its situations, its humour, and its dialogue—so distinctively English as to explain perhaps the impression of absurdity in a foreign critic who does not know his England. But that very fact is really, from another point of view, a merit in the work. Among so many English writers who, as I have said, in their theatre work separate themselves, as it were, from the world and the period in which they live, Pinero on the contrary has the great merit of keeping his eyes open, and of observing what is going on around him. *The Gay Lord Quex* is a true and mordant satire on modern social life; it presents, with an accuracy which seems almost cynical, the picture of a vitiated society in whose midst there moves, as in her native element, this sharp, vulgarly impudent little manicurist from New Bond Street—surely the most living, most real and witty study that has ever been made of the London *gamine*. And the third act of this comedy, where this *gamine* becomes involved in

a struggle for victory with Lord Quex, is the cleverest, finest, most human, and therefore most attractive bit of work that Pinero has ever penned. The critics have found nothing to equal this scene in the whole repertory of the English drama—saving, perhaps, the famous Screen Scene in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.

And now for a word or two upon our author's technique.

Pinero, who in the psychology of his plays is a realist, in their constructive side is a romanticist of the very first water. From the appearance of *Le Naturalisme au Théâtre* up to to-day, it had been generally considered necessary to eliminate from the production everything that would give the impression of artificiality. With this object the most simple situations were sought out; the smallest possible number both of incidents and characters were used; even the employment of the most legitimate theatrical devices was avoided, and it was sought, in place of dramatising an entire story, to seize one moment only in its sequence and to render that moment interesting in itself—without complications and without catastrophes.

But Pinero, on the contrary, has need not of one moment, but of several moments; in fact, he can scarcely content himself with less than a whole story, with its carefully prepared surprises, its sensational episodes, its elaborate combinations. In his very latest works the tendency becomes ever more noticeable. *Iris*—which the Italian public knows already—and *Letty* seem to be two novels adapted for the stage.

And not merely the general design is complicated in Pinero's dramatic works—but even the details of their

surroundings, even their accessories are all carefully considered. You would have thought that an artist who could create such characters as Paula and Sophy Fullgarney would have been entirely absorbed in his own ideal conception of the characters, without troubling his mind with the conventional and mechanical side of the stage representation. But exactly the opposite is the case. Some time ago a friend of mine wished to take from *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* the *libretto* of an opera for the *maestro* Giordano. I spoke of the matter for him to Pinero, who showed himself quite disposed to do business. Among other things, he said to me on that occasion that he regarded Giordano as a talented musician, that he had seen *Fedora* at Venice and had been delighted with it—and that he had especially admired, in the garden scene, the clever arrangement of the tables, the chairs, the flowers, and the felicitous grouping of the characters. This last remark surprised me a little then; but I could explain it to myself very easily later on when I had had under my eyes the “author’s copy” of several of his plays. For the stage directions in these were quite three times as long as the text! Pinero not only gives a most minute description of each scene, going so far as to prescribe the colours of the stuffs used to cover the chairs and the sofas, not only does he indicate every step and every movement of the actors and actresses, but he even suggests their very gestures, their attitudes, the expression of their faces, the glances of their eyes, the inflections of their voices. And I will add something now which is even stranger—that his actors and actresses, beginning from the leading

parts to the very smallest, precisely carry out the instructions which he has noted for their guidance. If you were to first read the author's copy of one of his plays, and then go to see it as produced upon the stage, your first feeling would be one of displeasure ; for you would imagine yourself to be seeing wooden puppets, moved about by means of invisible threads of wire by the guiding hand of—Pinero ! Our Italian comedians could not be got to move on these lines ; and I mention this to their credit, in spite of that commonplace of our critics that our actors and actresses never give sufficient study to their parts, and interpret them too freely. Yet I believe that Goldoni never wrote, outside the actual dialogues, more stage directions than as follows : "Such and such an Act, Such and such a Scene—Florindo and Rosaura." But his Florindo and Rosaura could move of themselves upon the stage, with a real impression of life and emotion, because our actors and actresses are generally artists, because they feel the stage production as a creation in which they take their share—and not as a lesson learnt in parrot fashion by heart.¹

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray marks the culminating point in Pinero's artistic career. He gives evidence, however, of consistent fertility, and it may be said that

¹ *Translator's Note.*—In discussing this passage last week with an American friend, himself a known dramatist, he fully defended Mr. Pinero's action in this respect, and added—with one of those felicitous expressions which often come from across the Atlantic—that the main thing in a play was that it should be "actor-proof !" My own small experience of theatre production fully endorses this view—save when we meet with the genius of an Ellen Terry, an Eleonora Duse—or, in the case of our present author, a John Hare, an Alexander, a Mrs. Campbell, an Irene Vanbrugh.

he produces a fresh work every year. His two last—*A Wife without a Smile* and *His House in Order*—were a failure and a success respectively. The latter play, in its rendering of the social atmosphere and in its study of the inner workings of Nina's soul, very closely recalls *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. It was immensely successful, especially in Italy, on account of the excellent opportunity it affords to a leading actress. But it does not appear to me, from an artistic point of view, to accentuate either the merits or the defects already apparent in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The catastrophe of the play, for instance, is brought about by an even more antiquated and commonplace device in the former than in the latter play. The finding of a letter, or a packet of letters, is an incident that may happen in real life, and that may be followed by certain consequences; but we have seen it so many times upon the stage that we have come to consider it one of the conventional devices of fiction, rather than a possible episode in real life.

And now I must briefly deal with a dead author whose artistic resurrection is being attempted of late. Whatever the result, the attempt will not have been without its uses. It proves, in my opinion, that if Oscar Wilde had not disappeared ignominiously from the face of the earth, he might have given to the English theatre new elegances of thought and form, fresh refinements of psychological observation, more epigrams, more witticisms—but not the drama or the comedy which would have re-created the English stage. Not because Wilde lacked the dramatic instinct, but because this instinct, instead of developing freely and rising to further and

loftier creative heights, had been gradually distorted by the hypercritical attitude and the æsthetic vanity of this artist.

On November 20th, 1904, *Lady Windermere's Fan* was revived at the St. James's Theatre ; but Walkley noted very justly in the next morning's *Times* that the play, although it was barely twelve years old, seemed already out of date ! The epigrams, which once made it appear so brilliant, had become commonplaces of everyday talk, and there was no longer any interest in hearing them repeated on the stage. But if you take away the epigrams, if you take away this display of a keen and paradoxical wit, what remains that is worth having in *Lady Windermere's Fan* or, for that matter, in Wilde's other comedies ?

More interesting than this revival, than that of the *Ideal Husband* at the Coronet Theatre in September of 1905, than that of *A Woman of No Importance* at His Majesty's in 1907, and even than that first, and almost clandestine, private production of *Salomé* (defined by the critic of the *Daily Telegraph* as a mixture of puerility and putrescence !), which took place under the auspices of the New Stage Club at the Bijou Theatre in March of 1905, was the publication at almost the same time in Germany of a youthful and unknown tragedy, *Die Herzogin von Padua : Eine Tragödie von Oscar Wilde. Deutsch von Max Meyerfeld* (Berlin, Egon Fleischel). The translator here tells us that the tragedy was composed for the actress Miss Mary Anderson, with the title *The Duchess of Padua*, but that it was never placed upon the stage. Therefore the German version of Meyerfeld must be the only form of publication ever yet

given to the original manuscript. The plot of the tragedy will thus be new to many of my readers.

We are in the Cinquecento. Guido Ferranti, a youth of unknown parents, receives one day a mysterious letter, which gives him a no less mysterious rendezvous in the market-place of Padua. Guido keeps the appointment, and finds himself face to face with a certain Moranzone, who has an important family secret to reveal to him. And here it is. Guido has noble blood in his veins : he is son of the Duke of Parma, who had once been tortured and killed by his dearest and most intimate friend. "What friend?" . . . But Guido must first swear to avenge his father, and Moranzone will then reveal the friend's name. The young man gives his oath—and Moranzone, pointing out a princely cortège which is approaching, replies to him : "The man before whom I am about to kneel is the murderer of your father!" Then he kneels down, very naturally and as becomes a good subject—before the Duke of Padua.

In Act II we find that Guido has become a favourite of the Duke. For his vengeance is to be as terrible as even the crime it is to punish. To kill the Duke is not enough, but he must first betray him—even as the Duke had betrayed his father. And this Lord of Padua is a tyrant, who treats his subjects like so many dogs, flays them alive, dishonours them, or keeps them in a constant torment of terror. In vain his young wife, the lovely Duchess Beatrice, by many years his junior, tries to defend and to protect them, to bring justice and moderation into her husband's counsels. Her efforts are lost upon this brutal tyrant ; but on the other hand

the goodness, the charm, and beauty of Beatrice have conquered the heart of Guido, who falls madly in love with her. His love is returned, and this position of affairs has almost led Guido to abandon and forget all his scheme of vengeance. But one day a casket reaches him, within which are two daggers. It is a warning and reminder from Moranzone; Guido has sworn—and must fulfil his oath! Without saying why (and in fact his notions here become rather difficult of comprehension) he now confesses to Beatrice that an insurmountable barrier has arisen between them, and that all is now over—save to say farewell. This lady, however, does not take a resigned view of the situation. She prays, she implores, she weeps, she kisses, caresses—and contests Guido's decision with all the forces and all the arts suggested by her passion—but all in vain. At last, in despair, she resolves to take her own life in that very same night.

The night comes, and with it Act III, which is the finest of the tragedy. In a corridor of the Palace we find Guido and Moranzone conversing in undertones; the youth has resolved not to kill the Duke, but to enter his chamber and leave there the dagger with a letter in which he will declare to the Duke that, out of generosity, he renounces the vengeance which he could, had he willed it, have accomplished. Now it is Moranzone's turn to try to dissuade him from such sublime generosity.¹ Guido turns to leave him, when behold!

¹ *Translator's Note.*—My own slight acquaintance with Italian despots in the pages of history or contemporary records leads me to think that young Guido's Court career at Padua would have been a brief one! The only question would have been the precise variety of the torture to be employed.

—upon the very threshold of the Ducal bedchamber Beatrice appears, and advances towards them. The young man sees in her an angel sent from Heaven to bless his more humane methods of vendetta: he falls at her knees, implores her pardon, and begs her to fly with him. Beatrice, overpowered by his passion and her own, consents; but at that moment Guido seems to hesitate:—

Guido. First, I must repair to the Duke's chamber and leave this letter and this dagger there, that when he wakes——

Beatrice. When who wakes?

Guido. Why, the Duke.

Beatrice. He will not wake again.

Guido. What, is he dead?

Yes, he is really dead! For Beatrice, at the moment when she was about to take her own life, seeing the old brutal wretch of a husband—the cause of her present misery—beside her, is seized by a blind rage, and finishes him off with her own dagger. Now she is free! The obstacle which separated her lover from herself had ceased to exist. But Guido, when he hears her story, shudders with horror—and rejects the assassin! A new barrier, even higher, more impassable than the previous one, has now come between them. Beatrice now must recommence her struggle against the young man's scruples of conscience (which certainly seem a little out of place in the Middle Ages)—must tell him at last that, if she killed the tyrant, it was for the sake of his love. Guido remains still immovable, and rejects all her advances. Then the lady, in whose heart we seem to always find the most violent passions

opposed to one another, runs to the antechamber, calls the guard, and has Guido arrested as the Duke's murderer.

In Act IV Guido is on his trial for the crime. Beatrice, fearing that he may have to confess the truth, wishes his judges to condemn him without a hearing, but the latter (here again we seem to trace a lack of Mediævalism in the characters) decide to let the accused defend himself. And Guido, after having revealed his true paternity and the reasons why he hated the Duke, declares generously that he was the murderer. Beatrice, in whose character good impulses alternate with bad, wishes then to confess herself the culprit; but now it is too late to save him, and she can only die at his side.

This tragedy, in spite of grave defects, both of construction and of historical probability, in spite of its obvious *souvenirs* of the *Hernani* of Victor Hugo and the *Lorenzaccio* of De Musset, is full of force, movement, and contrasted emotions. Written in 1883, when he could not yet have had under his eyes certain models of Sardou, such as *Theodora* and *La Tosca*, Wilde has here created a most seductive woman's character, of which I should not be surprised if Sarah Bernhardt or La Duse became enamoured.

For the whole tragedy is centred in Beatrice. In Act I she makes a splendid entrance under a canopy of cloth of gold, when she descends the steps of the Cathedral of Padua in the midst of a crowd which is captivated by her extraordinary beauty. In Act II Beatrice appears in a sympathetic rôle, as the one restraining influence on the tyrannous savagery of

the Duke ; and later she appears as the woman of passion, so intense in her love as to prefer to take her own life than to endure its loss. In Act III we see her, with hands still crimson with her husband's blood, supplicating for that love for whose sake she has not hesitated to commit murder and to imperil her own soul. But she is rejected ! Then indeed all her love becomes turned into hatred, and she betrays her lover and longs for his death—until the moment when his own generosity reawakens in her soul better sentiments, in the strength of which she goes gladly to sacrifice and to death.

This woman, who thus passes from a life of high endeavour to one of passion, from passion to despair, from despair to crime, from crime to disillusionment, from disillusionment to a base and cruel revenge, only to return to a tragic elevation of spirit—is really a most powerful creation of the modern stage, in whom dramatic pathos finds its finest artistic expression.

This tragedy, which made as I have mentioned its first appearance in a German translation, has never been produced in England, where, on the other hand—a few months later than its production abroad—there came to light in February of 1905, through the good offices of a friend, another posthumous writing of Wilde, *De Profundis*. If the report published lately by the *Berliner Tageblatt* is not true ; if Oscar Wilde is really dead, and not hidden away in some corner of the world—in a convent of Spain or a skyscraper of New York—then *De Profundis* may be considered in a sense as his literary testament.

This work, of which the publisher S. Rosen of

Venice, has brought out an Italian version, is a collection of notes and of thoughts written in Reading Prison a few months before he was set free; and its main theme and subject is always concerned with the struggle between the moral collapse and the consciousness of a highly intellectual life in one and the same individual.

Wilde speaks in this book of his tortures, of his remorse, his humiliation, of certain philosophical abstractions which he had followed out in his own thought with all the bitter pleasure of prison solitude, of his long periods of prostration and of his sudden rebellions. Who would know what this man's Calvary has been need only read the *De Profundis* and the two works recently published by Sherard and Gide.¹ These two works were privately printed in 1902, and circulated among a very limited circle. Their publication at this time seems to show that the friends and admirers of Wilde believe that the moment has now come to attempt at least the revival of the artist, if the rehabilitation of the man remains impossible. And, indeed, if we compare the horror with which his very name was pronounced a few years ago and the way in which men speak of him now, we see that the kindly and indulgent hand of time has treated him with some mercy.

When Oscar Wilde was arrested it seemed as if the man must disappear for ever beneath the general execration of mankind. The publishers immediately withdrew his books; the managers stopped the production

¹ R. H. Sherard, *The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*, and A. Gide, *Oscar Wilde* (with an introduction, notes, and list of works by Stuart Mason).

of his plays, and the Anglo-Saxon world even included in this crusade the friends and acquaintances of the unhappy wretch. For once the English spirit, habitually so calm, seemed moved to almost fanatical hatred.

Committed for trial and released on bail, Wilde went forth staggering from the prison of Holloway and drove in a cab to an hotel. Recognized there, he was immediately expelled by the proprietor. He went thence to an hotel in the suburbs; but some young men of good appearance, who kept their eyes upon his movements, followed him there and revealed his name to the hotel manager, threatening to set the house on fire if he were allowed to remain. Driven out again, he had in the dead of night to traverse the streets of London in search of a shelter, of some place to hide himself in.

At last he took courage—and knocked at the door of his mother's house. His brother opened the door. Oscar entered trembling, in a state of prostration, and fell down in the passage—a pallid wreck. A stone followed him from without. Then came the trial, and in the bars bets were exchanged on its result. Even when “hard labour” was given him, the public feeling was scarcely satisfied; for, after months of prison life, when Oscar Wilde was being transferred from a London penitentiary to Reading prison, he was recognized on the platform of a station; then it was that a gentleman—or one who had the appearance of such—came up to him, and spat in his face!

When the term of imprisonment was ended, and he went forth into the world again from Reading gaol, Wilde was taken by some friends to Dieppe, but even

there he was not left in peace. He had at last to leave the city, and take a villa some miles away in the village of Petit Berneval, under the assumed name of Sebastian Melmouth. His friend Sherard writes now that if the English public had shown the poor wretch a little mercy, if he had possessed the hope of even a distant pardon, Oscar Wilde might have been saved, might have found the courage to recommence his work. But the public remained implacable in its condemnation, and Wilde felt himself but a dead man in the living world. From Dieppe he went to Posilipo, to the house of a friend of good means, where at least he passed some few days in comfort. Then from Naples he returned to Paris, to take shelter in a fourth-class hotel in the Quartier Latin. Here there came the sudden end to his life's tragedy. For several days he had not even food to eat; several nights were spent in wandering on the Boulevards. From time to time he picked up something by anonymous work; and one or two comedies which had a certain success in London at this time were from his pen. An English publisher commissioned him to translate Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Ce qui ne meurt pas*, and—by a cruel irony of fate—it was in writing of “that which never dies” that death struck him down in his humble *chambre garnie*. One man alone stood by his pillow.

The picture which Sherard draws of Oscar Wilde rouses our pity, and inclines us to view the man without false hypocrisy, in all the profound sadness of his fall. Sherard had known him in earlier years in Paris, after his return from America; when Wilde wore his hair in imitation of that of Nero's bust in the Louvre; when at his work-table, where the writing-paper had the same

form as that of Victor Hugo, he attired himself in a cowled *robe de chambre* to imitate Balzac, whose ivory cane with its turquoise head he also carried in the streets. But with all this juvenile nonsense he really lived then a very pure life in Paris, and even when, to imitate Baudelaire, he felt it necessary to drink absinthe, he did so with moderation.

He was a true lover of the beautiful, and also of pleasure: but his horror at this time for all that was coarse and ugly was so real that when he had been once presented to Paul Verlaine, he felt so intensely the deformity of the French poet that he refused to meet him again. His own tenderness of feeling is witnessed by his devotion to his mother, and the happy time he spent with his wife in the earlier days of their married life. In his conversation with others he actually opposed himself to any suggestive or indecent talk; and in fact the poor fellow had at heart the instincts of a gentleman—instincts which survived to add to the horror of his later degradation.

On the eve of the expiration of his sentence an American reporter called upon the Governor of the prison, and gave Wilde to understand he would pay him £1000 for a long talk on his prison experiences. Wilde's reply to the Governor was characteristic. "I do not understand, sir, how such a proposal can be made to a gentleman!" Of the strange moral perversion which brought about his ruin Sherard offers no explanation; but perhaps it was the luxury in which he came to live, his enormous literary gains—which in 1892 were £8000 a year—the dazzling effects of this sudden fortune, which made him believe that he could

do as he liked with the world that seemed at his feet, and which blinded in an unhappy moment his moral consciousness.

Yet, certainly, if his sin was great, his punishment was terribly severe; and this is what his friends seem to feel in their efforts to restore him to his place in art.

“Society,” he himself wrote, “as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars, so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints, so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.”

CHAPTER III

THE EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

IN the preceding chapter I treated of what may be called the drama of the “great British public.” I did not treat it—it may be well to mention—from an historical point of view, since it neither comes within the scope of my task, nor is it my intention to recapitulate in chronological order the vicissitudes of the contemporary English stage, but to convey to the reader, whose knowledge of the subject is limited, a broad and general impression of its leading characteristics. This impression, however, would be both incomplete and incorrect were the reader allowed to believe that English drama consists, or consists only, of that which so far has formed the subject of my sketches.

Pinero, Jones, Sutro, and Barrie too, besides others whose names considerations of space have prevented my doing more than mention, are the playwrights—good or bad—of the “commercial” drama; that is to say, of that drama which returns hundreds and thousands of pounds in fees to its authors, and as a set-off has to pay tribute to the ingenuousness, the vulgarity, the conventionality, and the intellectual limitations of the “great British public.” In other

words, up to the present time I have dealt only with such plays and with such writers as inspire us with scant confidence, owing to the general conditions by which they are environed, in the probability of a healthy revival of English drama by their means.

Such confidence must be sought elsewhere.

I remarked in my first chapter that side by side with the "great British public," created by modern civil conditions, with ideas, tastes, and sentiments which are the product of their environment, there is also a minor public—select, studious, cultured, and refined—a kind of intellectual aristocracy in the truest and best sense of the word. The persons who compose it are not, thank Heaven, Supermen! They do not waste their intellectual powers in brilliant chatter or in lazy contemplation. They pose neither as misunderstood nor as incomprehensible beings, nor do they seek to distinguish themselves from the "great British public" merely by affecting to despise its idols. Oscar Wilde, it should be noted, did not found a school, and the pose of the æsthete and the decadent no longer exists in England.

This limited public, which interests itself with intelligence, ardour, and discrimination in matters literary and artistic, generally possesses a solid and well-digested knowledge of the classics—English, as well as Latin and Greek. In fact, I do not believe that in any country is the national literature the object of so much study and attention as in England.

In Italy, such study is the monopoly of professors and scholars; but in England the continual multiplication of editions of the dramatists, poets, and novelists,

in short, of all writers—down to the humblest—known to English literature, and the copious, accurate, and unceasing production of fresh critical, historical, and biographical works, testify to a more lively, more fertile, and more widely diffused interest.

It would be difficult to name an English poet or novelist who has not, or has not had, his devotees. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson, Scott, Burns, Dickens, and Thackeray are the patrons of as many societies and clubs, each founded with the object of studying the master's works and of preserving his name in honoured remembrance.

The members of these societies and clubs meet ten or twelve times a year to celebrate their poet or novelist with due devotion, to recall anecdotes concerning him, and to listen to his praises! Frequently they publish special limited editions of his works, both artistic and costly, printed by hand on exquisite paper at the Essex House Press. Even Omar Khayyám, the Persian poet-philosopher, has his cult in London, and not a season passes without his devotees assembling at a banquet in order to drink to the memory of the Master, and to that of his gifted interpreter, Edward Fitzgerald!

Where the members of this elect public have their abiding-place, whence they come, and whither they go, it is difficult to say; but any one living in England is often made aware of the presence of its refined spirit beneath the coarse and clumsy personality of the multitude. It may be encountered in many different quarters: at one time in Mayfair, where there are still to be found peers and peeresses who combine an aristocracy

of intellect with the nobility of long descent; at another in the City, where not a few business men seek relief from the strain of commercial competition in the distractions of art and literature; or else in the obscure Franco-Italian restaurants in Soho, where many London Bohemians spend their evenings. There are painters and sculptors whose intellectual existence is passed in the luminous atmosphere of Ruskinian idealism; there are the Socialists, who in England have a literary origin, and have made the harmonies of art a stepping-stone to those of social justice; there are exiles of every class and of every profession—knights-errant of the ideal in the classic land of positivism, pilgrims in search of sunshine in the country of smoke and fog, priests of the beautiful in the Temple of Mercury!

Well, this limited public, in like manner that it has its own authors ancient and modern, its own novelists, and its own poets, possesses also its own drama. So far it is merely an experimental theatre. The first attempt was made by the well-known and highly-esteemed critic of the *Sunday Times*, Mr. J. T. Grein, and I could not describe it better than in his own words. In the *Stage Society News* of January 25th, 1907, Grein, after speaking of some plays of Jones and Pinero organized by himself in Holland in 1890, proceeds thus: "So great was the success of these English plays at Amsterdam that the managers of the Royal Subsidised Theatre sent me a cheque for £50 to be used in the interest of art in England. At the same time I had received another cheque for £30 for the translation of an English play. With these gigantic

sums, in the wake of Antoine of Paris, I founded the Independent Theatre, the first performance of which elicited no less than five hundred articles, mostly vituperating Ibsen, whose *Ghosts* inaugurated the movement, and obtained for me the honorary, if somewhat unflattering, title of 'the best-abused man in London.' In parenthesis, I should add here that this distinction clung to me for many years, that some families closed their doors against me because I had produced an immoral play, and that a well-known journalist, since dead, refused to be present at a banquet if I were invited. It cost me practically ten years of my life to overcome the prejudice created by an undertaking which even the enemy must admit has left its mark upon the history of our stage. *Ghosts* was produced on March 9th, 1891, under the direction of Mr. Cecil Raleigh, who, together with Mr. George Moore, showed great interest in the little society. Among our first members were George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, A. W. Pinero, H. A. Jones, Mrs. J. R. Green, and many other people of distinction ; but in spite of the flourish of adverse trumpets which greeted the birth of the Independent Theatre, the roll of our members never exceeded 175, and the income was barely £400 a year during the whole of its existence. In fact, so poorly was the theatre patronized that in October, 1891, we had only £88 in the bank, and it was due to the help of Frank Harris, Frank Danby, and a few others, that I obtained enough to give a second performance. This was *Thérèse Raquin* of Zola ; and again the air was pregnant with abusive language. The next bill was a triple one—a one-act play by Arthur Symons, founded

on a story by Frank Harris, Théodore de Banville's charming *Kiss*, translated by John Gray, and George Brandes' famous playlet, *A Visit*, in which Arthur Bourchier and Olga Brandon made a very great success. Even my friend the enemy could not see anything inartistic in this triple bill, and from now the waters became less troubled and the course clearer. I gave four performances a year in those days, and read about eight to ten English plays per week—a labour which was but poorly rewarded by results of any import. In 1892, however, in consequence of a challenge of Mr. George R. Sims, accompanied by a munificent offer of £100, Mr. George Moore allowed me to produce his first play, *The Strike at Arlingford*, which created much interest, and would now, I believe, be more fully appreciated than in those days when realism was looked upon as an intruder, and the author at war with all the critics whom he had denounced in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The greatest and most momentous success, however, which was achieved by the Independent Theatre occurred in 1893, when it was my good fortune to obtain from George Bernard Shaw the MS. of his first play, *Widowers' Houses*, which immediately marked him out as a man of destiny. If the Independent Theatre had done nothing else for the British drama than to give a hearing to George Bernard Shaw, I contend that it justified its existence and fulfilled its mission. The rest of the history can be rapidly resumed. Besides the three original plays named, there was produced, always under the able direction of Mr. H. de Lange, original work by Michael Field, by Mrs. Oscar Beringer, by Dr. Todhunter (*The Black Cat*,

which deserves revival), and several plays from the French, German, and Dutch. In 1894 the well-known novelist Miss Dorothy Leighton (now Mrs. Ashton Johnson) joined me as co-director, and substantial financial assistance was forthcoming from friends who took shares in the Independent Theatre, Ltd. When in 1897 it was found that the Independent Theatre had done its work, the record showed twenty-two productions in which, including one-act plays, twenty-six new plays were tried."

The Independent Theatre thus enjoyed but a short life; but during the seven years of its existence it did something more than exhibit in a sympathetic light the innovating enthusiasm and lofty artistic aims of its cultured and highly-gifted founder. The Independent Theatre, as Grein asserts with pardonable pride, "has left a mark upon the history of the English stage." This was the first skirmish, and was fought out with courage and rare discrimination. It was a call to arms destined to wake yet other champions, and to usher in a conflict having for its object the regeneration of the English stage.

In the summer of 1899, and two years after the Independent Theatre had closed its doors, a few enthusiastic lovers of the stage organized a small private society, with the object of producing comedies and dramas of a serious and artistic character, which neither actor-managers nor any other manager would ever dream of putting on the stage.

At the outset, the promoters would have been quite satisfied to hold their performances in some painter's studio or in a hall of any kind, without either stage

or scenery; but they failed to find a suitable building. Possibly they would have entirely abandoned the project, if the actress who was then playing at the Royalty Theatre had not courteously allowed them the use of her theatre for a few *matinées*. Hence it was there that on November 27th, 1899, the society, which had adopted the name of the "Stage Society," gave its first performance—a commencement of happy augury. At the present time, it numbers eight years of prosperous life and about 1200 members, and is a power in the English theatrical and artistic world.

Its statutes declare that the object of the Society is to encourage and promote the dramatic art; to serve as an experimental theatre, and to form an organization such as may eventually profit by every opportunity for the creation in London of a permanent Répertoire Theatre, of which the Society would undertake the direction and control.

Has the Stage Society remained faithful to its programme?

In its first season (1899–1900) it produced two comedies of G. B. Shaw (an author of whom we shall treat fully in the following chapter), a play by Sydney Olivier, another by Fiona Macleod,¹ *La Mort de Tintagel* by Maeterlinck, *Friedensfest* by Gerhart Hauptmann, and *The League of Youth* by Ibsen. The second season (1900–1) saw the production of a drama in one act, *The Three Wayfarers*, which the celebrated novelist Thomas Hardy adapted from one of his most powerful

¹ This feminine pseudonym concealed, until his death (on December 12th, 1905) in Sicily, the identity of William Sharp, a clever writer and a friend of Rossetti and R. L. Stevenson.

novels, a melodramatic farce which R. L. Stevenson, the well-known author of *Treasure Island*, wrote in collaboration with the poet W. E. Henley, a symbolical play by Laurence Alma-Tadema, daughter of the famous Anglo-Dutch painter, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* by G. B. Shaw, a comedy by W. Kingsley Tarpey, a classical drama by Gilbert Murray, *Pillars of Society* by Ibsen, and *Lonely Lives* by Hauptmann. In the third season (1901-2) were produced *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by G. B. Shaw, a comedy by H. Granville Barker, *The Lady from the Sea* by Ibsen, *The New Idol* by De Curel, and *Monna Vanna* by Maeterlinck. The fourth season (1902-3) brought plays by W. Somerset Maugham, St. John Hankin, Ian Robertson, S. M. Fox, a fifth comedy by Shaw, *The Good Hope* by the Dutch writer Hermann Heijermanns, and *When We Dead Awaken* by Ibsen. In the fifth season (1903-4) appeared *The Lower Depths* by Maxime Gorky, *The Philanthropists* by Brieux, *A Soul's Tragedy* by Robert Browning, a popular comedy by F. Fenn and R. Pryce, a play by R. O. Prowse, and *Where there is Nothing* by W. B. Yeats. In the sixth season (1904-5) *The Power of Darkness* by Tolstoi, a play by G. S. Street, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* by Brieux, a second comedy by Miss Alma-Tadema, and *Man and Superman* by G. B. Shaw. In the seventh season (1905-6) were produced *Jimmy's Mother*, a play in one act by Hope Merrick, *Dodo*, a comedy in three acts by E. F. Benson, *Lady Inger of Östråt* by Ibsen, *Maternité* by Brieux, *Midsummer Fires* by Sudermann, *The Invention of Dr. Metzler*, a play in one act by John Pollock, and *The Inspector General*, a farce in three acts by

Nicolai V. Gogol. Finally, the eighth season (1906-7) opened with *The Weavers* by Hauptmann, and a comedy in four acts by St. John Hankin, *The Cassilis Engagement*.

With some among the more notable among the Stage Society's playwrights, such as G. B. Shaw, Granville Barker, and St. John Hankin, I shall deal later; the others belong to the foreign stage. At any rate, the mere catalogue of works produced up to the present time will serve to convince the reader of the efforts made by the Stage Society to give to its experimental theatre, in its choice of plays, a literary and social character, which presents a notable contrast to the frivolity and emptiness of the "commercial" theatre. Its performances—which take place very quietly (*horresco referens!*) on Sundays, sometimes at one theatre, sometimes at another—are private, and are only attended by members of the Society and their friends. A note upon the programmes gives warning to intending visitors that once the curtain is up the doors will be closed, and no one will be allowed to enter until the end of the act, so as to avoid disturbing the spectators. Another note requests ladies to remove their hats. The actors and actresses, with the exception of a few amateurs, are professional players, who give their services gratuitously.

And now let us consider the course pursued by the Stage Society, and what are its results so far. If it had only served to present interesting and intellectual spectacles to its thousand and odd members, it would thereby alone have accomplished a meritorious work; but the Stage Society can boast of having rendered

real services to English dramatic art. Among others, it brought into notice the works of G. B. Shaw, and has created actors and actresses such as Granville Barker, C. Aubrey Smith, and Miss Hilda Trevelyan, who have since appeared upon the regular boards with great success.

Nor is that all. Some of the plays produced for the first time by the Society were subsequently put on by actor-managers and others, who would never have risked this step but for the experiment of the Stage Society, and the favourable verdict of the critics. I remember certain works of Shaw's, *A Man of Honour* by W. Somerset Maugham, *The Two Mr. Wetherbys* by St. John Hankin, and especially *The Good Hope* by Heijermanns, and '*Op o' Me Thumb*, clever scenes from popular life in London by Fenn and Pryce, which, after being brought into notice by the Stage Society, subsequently had a great success at the King's Theatre and the St. James's respectively. To the Society belongs also the credit of placing upon the stage unabridged versions of various works by foreign authors, who have given permission for their performance without fee or recompense.

I say "unabridged," because French, German, Norwegian, Japanese, and Italian plays have been, and are, occasionally produced also by the London "commercial" theatres, but with such alterations and adaptations as amount to a profanation of the original. *L'Enigme* of Paul Hervieu made its appearance at Wyndham's (under the title of *Cæsar's Wife*), stupidly adapted for the purpose of passing the Censor's scrutiny. Mrs. Brown-Potter, too, has on her con-

science a vulgar version of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, in which the duel between Turiddu and Alfio takes place on the stage to the accompaniment of Mascagni's music. Still, let Verga take comfort ! Ibsen has fared even worse. H. A. Jones and H. Hermann concocted, under the title of *Breaking a Butterfly*, a *Doll's House*, from which they eliminated Dr. Rank and the amours of Krogstad with Mrs. Linden, and crowned the whole by a "happy ending," in which Nora and her husband are reconciled, and tenderly embrace !

Fortunately Ibsen has not always been so barbarously treated even in England, and the credit for this does not belong to the Stage Society alone.

While we in Italy were yet ignorant of the very existence of the great Norwegian poet, a cultured and studious young Englishman discovered him in Munich, and with speedy intuition divined the power of his genius. He then diligently set to work to learn Norwegian, in order to read the master in the original ; he wrote of him in the London papers and reviews, and made known the treasures of art and of thought contained in his works. Edmund Gosse is now a high priest of English literature ; his graceful lyrics, his studies, so full of erudition and talent, his critical essays on foreign literature, have all combined to procure him an enviable reputation, and paved the way for his appointment to the office of Librarian to the House of Lords—a tranquil retreat which a saint might envy. But of all his merits posterity will perhaps judge his discovery made in 1873 to have been the greatest.

As a result of his learned and enthusiastic articles, translations of Ibsen's historical poems and social

dramas were commenced. For nearly sixteen years the study and discussion of Ibsen were exclusively confined to the literary camp, where Archer, Walkley, Shaw, and Grein victoriously championed his cause. It was not until 1889 that, thanks to the initiative of the Independent Theatre, some of his plays were put upon the stage and thus introduced to the general public. They met with an enthusiastic reception, and Ibsen made good for a time his footing on the English stage, where Miss Janet Achurch made an indelible impression in the part of Nora. Still, the Norwegian poet appeals in England, as elsewhere, almost entirely to the cultured public. That the English are able to boast of understanding and appreciating him better than my Italian fellow-countrymen is—apart from certain ethnical affinities—mainly because some religious and moral problems, some questions—such as those of atavism, feminism, and alcoholism—and not a few social types, find a readier comprehension and more frequent examples in the Anglo-Saxon than in our own psychology and life. The most profound, lucid, and convincing studies of the inner meaning of Ibsen's work are by English writers, just as the translations in verse and prose by William Archer are—in the opinion of the Norwegians themselves—the most accurate, effective, animated, elegant, as well as the most passionate to be found in any European language.

As to the influence that Ibsen may have exercised on English playwrights—except in the case of Shaw—the subject appears to me of little importance.

But let us return to the Stage Society.

One of its members remarked at the third annual dinner on April 4th, 1905, that it is not the destiny of the Society to flourish, but to continue to figure as a forlorn hope on the English dramatic horizon. It is certainly not to be desired that it should ever become commercial in its character and aims, but even now it is somewhat more than a forlorn hope.

We see every day fresh sympathies, fresh adhesions, fresh encouragement, and fresh support springing up around it. The cultured continue to swell its ranks; authors recognize the benefits which they may one day derive from it; actors and actresses vie in offering their services; the critics are almost unanimous in their approval; even the "great British public" itself has begun to be aware of its existence. With a few more years of experiment, with that constancy, that enthusiasm, that devotion of which the Society has already given proof, I see no reason why it should not lend effective aid to the movement initiated by Grein, the aim of which is to establish in London a permanent *Répertoire Theatre*.

Possibly the only danger which menaces it lies in its very earnestness. In order to counteract the vacuous unintellectuality of the conventional English stage, the Stage Society makes a practice of giving the preference in its repertory to works of a serious, symbolical, philosophical, and social character.

This is an antidote which may prove efficacious for a time, but woe to those who abuse it! The Society would thereby run the risk of becoming atrophied and sinking to the level of a monotonous and morbid school of stage sociology, alienating the goodwill of the public

and losing sight of the crowning objects of Art, as well as of the stage.

The Society is influenced too much in this direction by its most illustrious member, G. B. Shaw; but if it has the wisdom to assert its liberty in time—if it will only give respite to the works of Shaw, Ibsen, De Curel, Brieux, Maeterlinck, Tolstoi, Gorky, and Hauptmann, and impart to its repertory a more varied and comprehensive character—there will be fewer obstacles to its triumphant attainment of the goal which it has set before it.

The Independent Theatre was the pioneer of this movement, and the Stage Society took up and continued its labours; but the former was, by the force of circumstances, extremely limited in its development and its action, while the latter—though the results of its efforts have been both salutary and encouraging—has not yet succeeded in divesting itself of its amateur character.

A much more extensive and important experiment, on the other hand, is that which has now been proceeding for more than three years at the Court Theatre, in consequence of which the eyes of all who labour and hope for a healthy reform of the English drama are fixed on Sloane Square.

The history of this experiment is the history of one of the youngest and at the same time most efficient English *hommes de théâtre*—Mr. Granville Barker. He was born in London in 1877, and has a little Italian blood in his veins, his grandfather being Dr. Bozzi, who left Milan to settle in England about 1821. He studied at a private school in South Kensington, and learned elocution from his mother. It would appear that his

vocation for the stage developed at a very early age, since we find him making his first appearance at Margate when only thirteen. He afterwards played with Charles Hawtrey and Ben Greet, and in 1899, appearing as Richard II in a performance of the Elizabethan Stage Society, he had the satisfaction of winning praise from Sidney Lee, the eminent Shakespearian scholar. But what attracted Granville Barker was not the stage in general, but a particular form of drama. Both as actor and as author, his aspirations lay in the direction of the intellectual drama. Hence, in 1899, he joined the Stage Society, the programme and the spirit of which appealed to his artistic tastes, and both acted and wrote for it. From this time onward the only possible road to the attainment of his ambitions lay clear before Granville Barker, and he decided that if he did not speedily succeed in realizing his ideals, he would definitely abandon the stage.

Meeting with Mr. Vedrenne, an enterprising manager, he discussed with him a project of his own for running a stock company in some small theatre. The project fell through owing to lack of capital, but in the autumn of 1904 Mr. J. H. Leigh, proprietor of the Court Theatre, proposed to Granville Barker to undertake the production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at that house. He consented, on the condition that Leigh allowed him to announce also five or six matinées of *Candida*.

Thus then did the young actor-dramatist find his opening. At the beginning of 1905 Mr. Vedrenne became lessee of the Court, and the theatre formally passed under the control of the Vedrenne-Barker management. After

giving two series of *matinées* in the autumn of 1904 and spring of 1905, on May 1st of the latter year the management inaugurated evening performances also. Two years have now elapsed, and the experiment has proved financially successful; or, rather, instead of alluding to it as an experiment, it would be more correct to describe it as a securely established undertaking, with a future full of encouraging possibilities for English drama.

What, then, has Granville Barker given us at the Court Theatre? Above all, an efficient corrective to the system of the long run. In two years—incredible as it may seem in the case of a present-day London theatre—he has produced twenty-five different works. It is true that this is hardly the same thing as a repertory theatre, since neither has the Court a stock company, nor does it constantly vary its productions. Still, it has accomplished at least one stage in the right direction. Instead of staging a play at enormous expense, and being consequently committed to a run of months at a time in order to recoup himself for the outlay, Granville Barker with great wisdom keeps the expenses of mounting his plays within reasonable limits, and is thus able to effect frequent changes in the bill. And, what is still more important, the artistic standard, or, at all events, the artistic intention, of all works thus billed is commendably high. The “great British public,” with which we dealt in our first chapter—artless, coarse-minded, and dull-witted—does not frequent the Court Theatre; the entertainment there is not to its taste. The Court audiences are composed of persons of culture and

students, with a goodly percentage of society people. An attempt was made to introduce the system of subscriptions for the season, and one would have thought that in a theatre of this class the innovation would have caught on; but at the end of the second season the number of subscribers only amounted to twelve, and the experiment consequently had to be abandoned. The public has not yet been educated up to the idea, and possibly it has been found unsuited to certain conditions of London life and topography. Nevertheless, for my own part, if I were going to the theatre, not like the average playgoer to extract a passive amusement from a farrago of sentimental or romantic nonsense, but in search of real æsthetic enjoyment, I would elect to go—in spite of an hour's train or omnibus journey—three or four times a month to the Court Theatre. The plays presented are always more or less good, and maintain a consistent standard of intelligence, while the acting is perfect. There are no stars (blessed relief!), but the company always numbers excellent actors and actresses among its members. Mr. Granville Barker selects these with great judgment for each several performance, from various sources, according to the exigencies of the play to be produced, and then devotes such care to the welding together of the different elements, that the result is invariably a happy and harmonious whole. In the matter of *ensemble* the performances at the Court stand on a level with that which ruled once on a time at Antoine's *Théâtre Libre*.

Let us rapidly glance at his repertory. Of Shaw's plays given at the Court Theatre, as of those performed

by the Stage Society, we shall speak at length farther on, and of Euripides . . . we will only say that he is here represented by the superb translation of that distinguished Hellenist and tragic poet, Gilbert Murray, Professor of Greek, first at the University of Glasgow, and then at that of Oxford. I am somewhat doubtful of the expediency of these classical productions at a theatre like the Court, whose most pressing necessity is to popularize its experiment ; that is to say, to attract as speedily as may be an intelligent, but at the same time an extensive public. I have too, as a rule, but little sympathy with stage productions of the Greek tragedies, unless in a setting of solemn magnificence. But the attempt proves, if nothing else, the high-toned ambitions of the management. Of the works of modern foreign authors, plays by Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, Hauptmann, and—needless to say—by Ibsen have been put on. But what has appeared to me more interesting than these has been the production of plays by English authors—other than Shaw—who have manifestly been guided in their work by the standards of the Court Theatre, and whom we might describe, adjectively, as “Courtians.”

It was natural that of these the most characteristic “Courtian” should be H. Granville Barker. He had already given to the stage, with more or less success, sundry slight works, but it was on November 7th, 1905, that he scored his first notable triumph as an author. *The Voysey Inheritance* is a strange play, and conveys a strange sensation—it chills ! Is it because it lacks vital energy, or because a certain grey fatalism broods over it? I know not. The story neither commences nor

finishes upon the stage. It commences with the grandfather, or possibly great-grandfather, Voysey, whom we have never seen, and it finishes—if there be an end—with the son, or possibly the grandson, of Edward Voysey. But it is precisely this impersonal continuity of the play which gives us a sense of generalization. The moment we have grasped this sense of generalization, and detect the social type behind the stage character, the personal fortunes of the Voysey family cease to interest us. In this revelation of the social type lies the merit of the work, which, nevertheless, has its defects. The action is somewhat slow, and the atmosphere hazy; the characters, too, display an imperturbability which in places seems to me almost ultra-British. From a stage point of view, I consider that it has one capital fault—the inversion of the process by means of which the playwright who has a story to tell should keep alive the interest of his audience. That is to say, instead of commencing with the gradual delineation of types and situations, in order to arrive at the climax, he commences with the climax in order to arrive at the presentation of types and situations.

Another “Courtian” is St. John Hankin, who has produced two works at this theatre—*The Return of the Prodigal* and *The Charity that began at Home*. The former appears to me the more worthy of note. It is original, with an originality that is, perhaps, forced—but still amusing. The hero of St. John Hankin’s play is not our old acquaintance the conventional Prodigal Son, repentant, reformed, and lachrymose. Not at all! He is a genial rascal, whose one idea is to make capital

out of his return. He has never been good for anything except squandering money. It is not his fault, any more than it is a credit to his father and brother that they happen to be, on the contrary, honest and industrious; both he and they are simply creatures of circumstance. Such at least is the explanation of the son, who is at any rate prodigal—of verbiage! His deeds are still more questionable, for, among the other pieces of rascality that signalize his return, he succeeds in stealing away the heart of his brother's betrothed. When his family have arrived at the end of their patience, they show him the door. But the Prodigal Son declines to accept this solution, unless he is paid to keep away from home! In order to get rid of him, his people accept this condition, and he returns to the exercise of his . . . profession. He has several defects—in fact, he is somewhat cynical, rather verbose, and, above all, too much addicted to blackmail—but it is, at all events, in his favour that he has none of the virtues of the Prodigal Son of Hall Caine!

A third author who is also a "Courtian," but very different from Granville Barker and St. John Hankin, is John Galsworthy. His *Silver Box* is the best play that has been produced at the Court Theatre under the Vedrenne-Barker management. It is a comedy in three acts, which tells how the son of an unconsciously hibernating, wealthy Liberal M.P. steals a promiscuous lady's purse in a drunken frolic, and gets off scot-free, while the charwoman's out-of-work husband pockets a cigarette-box, and is sent off to prison. The play is so well constructed, with so much restraint and lucidity of

expression, with such a sense of proportion in the dialogue and in the delineation of character, that it is difficult to believe it the work of an author who had never before written for the stage. The particular merit of the work lies in its observant and thoughtful character, without either philosophical pose or propagandist chatter. In contrast to his influence on Granville Barker and St. John Hankin, Shaw—far from contaminating Galsworthy—has, so to speak, not even grazed his skin! Nor is there any fear of this happening in the future. Galsworthy has proved himself by this play, as he had already done by his novels (notably in the case of his last published work, *The Country House*), an artist of great originality and individuality. His aims, as revealed in his works, are both moral and ideal, but he leaves their direct revelation exclusively to the medium of his art—to the characters and episodes he introduces upon the stage or in his books, which are all documents from real life. Galsworthy is a realist, or, in other words, he possesses the temperament best calculated to produce good dramatic work, and let us hope that he will continue to produce it.

Others have written and continue to write for the Court. Fenn produced there his comic studies of low life in London, and quite recently Miss E. Robins has contributed to its bill a comedy, *Votes for Women*, with a very clever picture of a meeting in Trafalgar Square. It is an established fact that all attempts and all efforts in the direction of more serious dramatic work can now find a stage open to them. All that now remains to be seen is what the result will be.

To cherish the illusion that it is in the power of the Court Theatre, alone and unaided, to educate and transform the taste of London playgoers is neither logical nor possible. Hence, whatever may be the fate in store for the Vedrenne-Barker undertaking, the bulk of English dramatic productions will remain as they are, because the "great British public"—for the reasons which I have set forth in my first chapter—is beyond all hope of artistic salvation. But the Court may continue to become more and more the theatre of the cultured and intelligent minority. Thus, the larger and more constant this minority becomes the greater will be, in my opinion, the chances of Mr. Barker's succeeding in establishing a real Répertoire Theatre. As far as intentions go, he is already well on the way towards it. He will, of course, have many difficulties to overcome, and great care will be needed to avoid some errors. The most fatal of these will be if he—following the standards of the Stage Society in the choice of plays—should confine himself to the intellectual and propagandist repertory. Woe to the Court, if it should become a dramatic branch of the Fabian Society ! or if he should continue to give preference to philosophical treatises, discussions, or tracts in one or more acts, instead of to good and healthy social and psychological plays—such as those which abound in the French and German repertory of yesterday and to-day, and which some young English artists might feel themselves impelled to write. Above all, it is to be hoped that the Court Theatre will raise the standard of revolt once for all against its chief prophet, even as Zion City rebelled against the Second

Elijah. And of that prophet—if it is only to justify my incitement to rebellion—it is time for me to discourse with the amplitude and attention that a prophet deserves.

Who and what is G. B. Shaw?

CHAPTER IV

G. B. S.

SOCIALIST, member of the Fabian Society, Imperialist, teetotaller, vegetarian, anti-vivisectionist, town councillor, musical and dramatic critic, pamphleteer, mob orator, novelist, playwright, and lecturer, George Bernard Shaw is one of the best-known characters in England. Perhaps he is also the most original and amusing.

One biographer has described him as a thorough-going "Humanitarian"; and I remember that one day the *Daily Mail* published on its sixth page (which is always illustrated) a large clock-face, with G. B. Shaw's silhouette marking all the hours; for instance, Shaw rising in a meditative mood, Shaw writing "plays with a purpose," Shaw being interviewed upon the question of the day, Shaw haranguing a Socialist meeting, Shaw addressing his colleagues of the municipal council, Shaw discussing social questions with members of the Fabian Society, Shaw drawing up an electoral manifesto—in a word, Shaw spending the day without a minute for himself, devoted from morning till night to the noble cause of social improvement.

The public takes very different views in its opinion of G. B. Shaw. There are some who take him quite

seriously, who exalt his fame to the skies as the Euripides of the Victorian era, and who weigh his claims against those of the Elizabethan Aeschylus, and some who even laugh at him and his ideas. "Feminists" see in him an Anglo-Saxon Ibsen ; women in general go mad about him, whether they happen to be feminists or not. The critics handle him severely, because one day he said to them quite plainly, *sans phrases* : " You are a set of hopeless idiots ! I don't give you this description by way of an insult, but as a wholesome tonic." The theatre managers do not invariably accept his plays, any more than the town councillors of St. Pancras accept all his programme of Municipal Socialism. But that does not interfere in the least with his success. G. B. S. (with him initials are sufficiently world-famous !) is at forty-eight already a legendary hero, like his predecessor in varied activity, the Flying Dutchman.

Irish by birth, but brought up in London, he has no weakness of sentiment either for the country which he has abandoned, or for that of his later adoption, which has hitherto dominated the former to its detriment. As a matter of fact, his genius is only partly Irish ; for he is the very negation of that hidden and melancholy lyricism which is one of the characteristics of the Celtic temperament ; while, on the other hand, he has all the reckless gaiety, the keen humour, the vivacious brilliancy which are equally typical of the race.

In London G. B. Shaw made his way into journalism as critic, passing from one concert to another, from a picture show in Bond Street to one at the New Gallery, from a Shakespearian production at the Lyceum

to a pantomime at Drury Lane, preaching the new artistic gospels of Wagner and Ibsen, attacking the privileges and the conventions of the Royal Academy, making a critical massacre of the English stage, with all its absurdities and conventions, getting into hot water at one time with the public, at another with the theatre managers, or with painters, actors, musicians, and playwrights—but all the time proclaiming the need of an art which should be serious, living, and modern, nourished on original thought and feeling, on the study of real life, an art which should be educational in the best sense, but yet as free from academic fetters as from all the hypocritical conventions of society.

His criticisms in the *Saturday Review* made a stir, and later he published these in two volumes under the titles of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* and *The Perfect Wagnerite*. Though he was getting by degrees at the reading public, and becoming appreciated both for his vivacity and brilliancy and for his paradoxical humour, he had not yet succeeded in convincing any one of them or bringing them round to his views; for at first the further he advanced on his chosen path the deeper became the gulf between himself and the public. It was like a phenomenon of Daltonism; what others saw white, he saw black. The question became which of the two was colour-blind.

This question was solved by Shaw to his own satisfaction through the visit of a friend, “a physician who had devoted himself specially to ophthalmic surgery. He tested my sight one evening, and informed me that it was quite uninteresting to him because it was ‘normal.’ I naturally took this to mean that it was

like everybody else's ; but he rejected this construction as paradoxical, and hastened to explain to me that I was an exceptional and highly fortunate person optically, 'normal' sight conferring the power of seeing things accurately, and being enjoyed by only about ten per cent of the population, the remaining ninety per cent being abnormal. I immediately perceived the explanation of my want of success in fiction. My mind's eye, like my body's, was 'normal'; it saw things differently from other people's eyes, and saw them better."

Fortified by this conclusion, G. B. Shaw has devoted himself in his articles, his stories, his lectures, his essays and his plays to an ophthalmic cure of mankind in general and of the English in particular. Alas ! with what results as yet we should find it difficult to say. Mankind, which in physical matters wishes for nothing better than remedies and recipes, and is always ready to be taken in by clever quacks, is on the contrary very indifferent and sceptical upon purely moral remedies and recipes. And it must be owned that those put forward by Shaw are not of the character to inspire much confidence. His thought is not always easy either to follow or to define. He tells people: I am a Socialist ! That, in England, is already a hard saying. But that is not enough for him. For if he accepts the fundamental principles of Socialism, he has also a method which is peculiarly his own of bringing them into line with the philosophy of Nietzsche, with Imperialism, and finally with Protectionism. G. B. Shaw, you must know, boasts that he himself at Glasgow was a clear three weeks ahead of Chamberlain in

initiating the great fiscal campaign which has sown discord throughout the Empire.

Apart from this, our author is one of the pillars of the Fabian Society, for which he has written several propagandist pamphlets and an occasional electoral manifesto. He is a staunch advocate of Municipal Socialism, and is the author of a work on *Municipal Trading*, which has the immense merit of treating the question without overloading it with statistics. But, partly from his temperament, partly through the complete political inaction of English Socialism according to the doctrines of Marx, Shaw has remained essentially an "ideologue." He would gladly revolutionize, besides the economic constitution of society, its psychical condition, its moral conceptions, and its cerebral routine. In his criticism of our methods of life, in unmasking our social hypocrisies, in revealing to the light all our selfishness and weakness, in denouncing all our injustice, he deals blows with a hatchet worthy of Max Nordau himself.

For really this hatchet of Shaw's is, too, a terrible weapon of destruction, all the more so that it is used without sentimentalism, without declamation, without rhetoric, with a cold rationalism, with sarcasm, irony, and a keen relish of humour. He is, as Anatole France would have put it, a propagandist "avec allégresse."

We Latins can assist at this work of demolition, either clapping our hands in approval or hissing in derision, but in any case without indignation or violent disapproval. For these idols, which Shaw is so busily knocking down, have either fallen some time ago from our altars, or remain on their pedestals without exciting

our reverence. We—and I speak here more especially of the Italians—are unprejudiced by nature, and sceptical from idleness. Our life, our habits, our social relations are—neither more nor less than those of others—within the orbit of many conventions; but in our easy intellectual dilettantism we are more ready than others to admit the fact, and for the same reason less inclined to be scandalized at its assertion. But imagine to yourselves the “home”—that sacred “home” of English life—taken by assault by this diabolical iconoclast, shaken to its foundations, stripped of its green ivy and its poetic charm, deafened with hisses and laughter; cheapened, insulted, dragged through the mud. It is a spectacle that has the elements of tragedy as well as comedy; and at least it succeeds in making the personality of G. B. S. intensely interesting.

I have heard the following impertinence—that England without him would be intolerably dull! What is, however, quite as certain is that without England G. B. S. would not even possess those “few years of immortality” to which he modestly limits his aspirations. And—even without troubling immortality so far—if he is at present in view, it is because he has made a clever spring upon John Bull’s back, which, as we all know, has been blessed by Providence with fairly broad shoulders.

The English middle-class, which it has been his wish to *épater*, is indeed marvellously portrayed in some of his comedies, and, above all, dissected with a master hand here and there in his writings. No modern author has ever known and represented with the same truth—one might say with the same ferocious exactitude—this

English "middle-class," with its stupidity—or sobriety of intellect (as Shaw would put it)—its ignorance, its cant, its hypocrisy, its greed for money, its intense admiration for success, its "self-respect," its blind pride, its national conceit, its conventionality, and its prejudices.

Above all, certain new aspects of English life he has been able to analyse and define with the greatest skill—such as, for instance, the Imperialist movement, the love of theatrical effects, of luxury and display and great functions. And among the types which he places on the stage, the unctuous clerical humbug, the thieving capitalist who seeks fresh victims to skin, the odious man of business, the intriguing professional person, the "gassy" politician, the fidgety, hypochondriacal man of leisure, and the military charlatan are perhaps the most noticeable and the happiest.

But he does not take any special pride in these creations of his. His wish has been not so much to make a comedy of character—a *comédie de mœurs*—as to write a comedy of ideas, of propaganda, or, as he prefers to call them himself, "problem plays" and "propagandist dramas."

Take, for instance, *Widowers' Houses*. What interests him here, and what he wishes to interest the public in, is not the type of the unscrupulous speculator—a type in which, even in spite of himself, he has achieved in this play a very marked success—but rather the whole "housing question"; that is to say, the great question in modern London of the enormous profit made by the landlord at the expense of the poor. In a word, the people who go to his plays must not expect to be

merely amused, or get their emotions or senses stirred, but to think and, in some cases, to violently resent the conclusions placed before them. "Napoleon once gave to Talma a *parterre* of kings; for my part," says G. B. S., "what has always been my dream would be a *parterre* of philosophers. . . ."

Let us try—if it is only just to satisfy him—to become such before we take our stall. As a matter of fact, Shaw's plays are more pleasing and interesting in book form than they are upon the stage. The first collection of these plays is in two volumes, and is called, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. Why "unpleasant"? "The reason is pretty obvious," says the author in his preface; "their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts. No doubt all plays which deal sincerely with humanity must wound the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter. But here we are confronted, not only with the comedy and tragedy of individual character and destiny, but with those social horrors which arise from the fact that the average home-bred Englishman, however honourable and good-natured he may be in his private capacity, is, as a citizen, a wretched creature who, whilst clamouring for a gratuitous millennium, will shut his eyes to the most villainous abuses, if the remedy threatens to add another penny in the pound to the rates and taxes which he has to be half cheated, half coerced into paying."

The first of these "villainous abuses" which Shaw wishes his compatriots to look in the face is that of "slum landlordism"—that is to say, the exploitation by capitalists of the working-man's dwelling-houses.

To use the word “slum” in London is to speak of hovels, dirt, poverty, degradation. No one can imagine all the horrors who has not read the novels of Besant and Gissing, or studied the revelations of Charles Booth! You have to imagine long, interminable, monotonous rows of houses, grey, dirty, huddled together, colourless, sunless—without a line of beauty, without any character, without any contrast. They seem to go on interminably ; they rise, they fall, they interlace, crowd close one to another, as it were embracing, stretching away as if without an end into the far distance. In this region of “slums,” the famous East End of London, all is uniformly ugly, deplorably monotonous, unwholesome, without air, without light ; and that represents the homes of two millions of workers !

Such is the exterior ; and what is the life within ? From seven, eight, ten, up to fifteen living in one room, and that room used alike for sleeping, eating, washing, drying clothes, and often for working in ! It is by no means uncommon to see in a window a card with the words : “Part of a room to let !” In the one half of a room there are already father, mother, and perhaps three or four children ; in the other, partitioned off only by a few rags, perhaps a young married couple have come to spend their honeymoon ! For every inch of available space has been utilized to the utmost. In many families the girls sleep under the bed, where they get the most shelter from the cold, and the babies upon shelves fastened to the walls, between the bread and the bacon. It is quite a common thing to let out a bed to one person in the day, and to

another at night-time ; on the same mattress on which a young milliner sleeps at night, perhaps a baker sleeps in the daytime ! And the walls, the ceilings, the floors, the windows of these slums all falling to pieces—and the dirt, mould, and infection ! The rats are everywhere ! According to the statement of a sanitary official, in one house they were so numerous and so fierce that the children had to keep watch by turns at night, and protect those who were asleep from the attacks of these rodents. The “slum” is the principal cause of the physical deterioration of the London workman—who dies out after the third generation—of the high mortality in that city, of the propagation of consumption, and the low moral standard.

Now to mention a “slum landlord” in London—that is, a proprietor of these hovels—is to say usurer, vampire, slave-driver, scoundrel. For no form of exploitation is so heartless, and so profitable, as that of this “slum landlordism.” The scarcity of houses has enormously increased the rents. A scarcely habitable lodging costs twenty-five to thirty shillings a month ; and to get even these it sometimes happens that two or three families will compete—each offering a higher rent.

It is the “slum landlord” who is the gainer here ! His profits are constant and regular. If in South Italy there are often riots for bread, in working London there are “rent riots,” which the authorities vainly seek to pacify—by enactments. For the slum landlord always finds some means to elude the laws, and to flay alive his victims. It is a hellish traffic in human misery ! In one quarter of a century, from 1870 to

1895, the total increase of rents in the metropolis has been reckoned as about £80,000. Hence it may be seen that the problem of poverty is not more alarming in England than that of wealth. To give a crust of bread or find a home for the working-man is not perhaps as difficult as it would be to limit or arrest the passion for speculation and the greed of capitalists.

What a splendid subject for a popular drama ! But Shaw, on the contrary—dominated by ideas instead of by emotions—has made of it an atrociously satirical comedy. *Widowers' Houses* was produced in 1892 (at the very moment when the Ibsenite movement was most in fashion) at the Independent Theatre, where the well-known critic Grein had succeeded in getting it accepted. Its Biblical title may have deceived some few of the audience ; but the true nature of the comedy could not be long in doubt when Shaw, through the mouth of his leading character—an odious slum landlord, who scarifies the poor—shows in one scene that even a proprietor who is individually an honest man cannot, in the present order of things, avoid acting like a knave. The Socialists among the audience applauded ; others preferred to hiss ; the author, as is usual, came after the last act before the curtain, and took the opportunity to make a polemical harangue. The play created a sensation. For two weeks the papers discussed it freely, some considering it as a gross libel, others defending and exalting it as a work of art and instrument of progress.

I do not think it has been lately produced again before the public, but has remained in its place among the Socialist repertory. I remember myself having

made my first intellectual acquaintance with G. B. Shaw on May 1st, 1900, at the Crystal Palace, where upon the programme of the Working-men's Fête was precisely this production of *Widowers' Houses*. Artistically, this play—like almost all Shaw's work—is true in the presentation of certain characters, rich in most felicitous scenes, in moments of high psychological interest, in clever and witty situations handled with the greatest “go” and success. But it has also all the defects of Shaw and of “Shawism”—a form of disease which I will now analyse more fully.

Of these three “unpleasant” plays, I do not take under my consideration *The Philanderer*, a somewhat cynical inroad upon the field of matrimonial life, because artistically it seems to me rather poor in quality; and I come without more ado to the third of them. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is one of the most typical plays that Shaw has written. The profession of Mrs. Warren is one of those that the English law does not recognize. Not that there may not exist in the metropolis of the Empire, or in the great English provincial centres, the kind of private hotels to which the lady in question gave her attention at Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, and Buda Pesth. They may exist, but their form at least is different; and however this may be, the only apparent fact before us here is that Mrs. Warren has made her fortune abroad. Her own daughter Vivie knows nothing definite about it. She has indeed scarcely seen her mother, who only comes into her life at the end of each month through a communication from her banker. Vivie has been educated at college, has studied at the University, and taken an honours

degree in mathematics at Cambridge. She is a very strange and uncommon girl; she possesses a mixture of scepticism and practicality—two things which go naturally together, if we are to believe that philosopher who defined scepticism as the religion of practicality. In appearance she seems indifferent to everything. What specially is it that attracts her in life? Nothing that is romantic, and nothing that is especially womanly. “I like working,” she tells us, “and getting paid for it. When I’m tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigarette, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it.”

And this conception of life is really less prosaic than it appears. Vivie, who has never known who was her father, who has rarely even seen her mother, who has come into life free and independent of any ties whatsoever, does not know either affections or ideals. Life has been, morally speaking, so hard to her, that what little there is in it of honesty, goodness, sincerity, and sweetness must naturally seem to her either hypocrisy or sentimentality. The one real thing for her is work. She talks about it like a business man, to whom his work is synonymous with making money. But these words of hers count for little, or at least count as much as all the other delightful paradoxes which Shaw loves to put into the mouths of his characters. At the bottom of her heart Vivie feels the nobility of work just as much as any idealistic philosopher. And this feeling is really the foundation of her moral being. “If I thought,” she says, “that I was going to be a waster, shifting along from one meal to another with no purpose, and no character, and no grit in me, I’d open an

artery and bleed to death without one moment's hesitation. . . . People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them." With these clearly marked views, when Vivie comes to meet her mother the shock of these two characters is certainly interesting, and a very brilliant study in psychology. To do this justice, it would be necessary to quote the play very fully, and those of my readers who care to follow up the story will do better to read it for themselves. My own judgment would be that *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is a typical play of G.B.S.—not that it is a fine play in itself. But he has—somehow, even in despite of himself—written some really fine plays. Let us turn now to these.

One of them is in the second volume, which contains the "Pleasant" plays. There are four of them: *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, and *You Never Can Tell*.

The first of these is really neither a comedy nor a farce. The first night that *Arms and the Man* was produced it had a success, but Shaw, when called before the curtain at the end of the performance, hastened to disillusionize the public. The public had laughed at it, and by so doing had shown its complete misconception of the play; for the author's intention had not been to write a theatrical joke, but to treat a serious subject. A serious subject! The public laughed more than ever, and not without reason. The idea of trying to make people believe that this was a realistic

play, written with historical accuracy, is really one of Shaw's most delicious bits of banter!

The scene of *Arms and the Man* is in Bulgaria, during the war between Servia and Bulgaria in 1885, in fact at the moment of its conclusion, after the Servians with their (Austrian) officers had fled like hares before a reckless charge of the Bulgarians, which they were unable to resist, owing to their having been supplied with artillery—but no ammunition! The hero of the comedy is a Swiss, son of an important hotel-proprietor, who goes to the field of battle with his pockets full of chocolate—presumably Suchard's! But you must note that Shaw wishes to take even the chocolate seriously. “How ignorant my critics are!” he once remarked. “They are amazed because I feed my officers with chocolate; then how about the chocolate sent by Queen Victoria to her soldiers in Africa during the Boer War? Was that too one of my absurdities?”

But our Swiss friend, besides eating his chocolate, has also the rôle of making fun of war itself, of its prejudices and martial sentiments, of its patriotism and military “pose.” In fact, as a satire on professional militarism the work seems to me entirely successful, and I am astonished that the author has not submitted it for the Nobel competition. But as a fair reproduction of the war with its surroundings, the Bulgarians, if they knew of its existence, might cause G. B. S. to share the fate of Stambuloff; and it was, perhaps, to avoid another tragedy of the Balkans that the Viennese Censor forbade its production at the Burg Theatre! As a theatrical production, *Arms and the*

Man might have been a very brilliant comedy in characters and situations, if the author had not followed his frequent practice of forcing the situation, exaggerating the colours, and making of his characters so many caricatures, whose most fitting place would be in a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera.

It is very difficult to give any concise account of *You Never Can Tell*—in which, for three acts, three or four persons continue talking all the time at full pressure, arguing and dispensing their conclusions with the keenest intellectual pleasure. Talk, talk, talk!—in the midst of which the thread of the story becomes often as completely obscured as is frequently that of the disputant's reasoning.

The Man of Destiny is a comic sketch in one act—and at the same time one of the cleverest and most stimulating plays that I have ever read. If it were placed upon an Italian stage, it should make the fortune of a capable manager, as it has already done in the case of a German, who translated and produced it at Frankfort under the title of *Der Schlachtenlenker*.

The “Man of Destiny” here appears to us at Tavazzano on May 12th, 1798, just after the battle of Lodi. He is no other than Napoleon, but now engaged in a fresh conflict with a charming Anglo-Irish lady who has carried off certain dispatches. The fire of the Bridge of Lodi is as nothing compared to that exchanged between the two in the little inn of Giuseppe Grandi. The battle scarcely lasts an hour, but exhausts all the available resources of wit, sarcasm, humour, and even sauciness. At its conclusion Napoleon remains defeated!

Napoleon. That accounts for it. The English are a nation of shopkeepers. Now I understand why you've beaten me.

Lady. Oh, I haven't beaten you. And I'm not English.

Napoleon. Yes, you are—English to the backbone. Listen to me : I will explain the English to you.

Lady. Do.

Napoleon. There are three sorts of people in the world—the low people, the middle people, and the high people. The low people and the high people are alike in one thing : they have no scruples, no morality. The low are beneath morality, the high are above it. I am not afraid of either of them ; for the low are unscrupulous without knowledge, so that they make an idol of me ; whilst the high are unscrupulous without purpose, so that they go down before my will. Look you ; I shall go over all the mobs and all the courts of Europe as a plough goes over a field. It is the middle people who are dangerous : they have both knowledge and purpose. But they, too, have their weak point. They are full of scruples—chained hand and foot by their morality and respectability.

Lady. Then you will beat the English ; for all shopkeepers are middle people.

Napoleon. No, because the English are a race apart. No Englishman is too low to have scruples : no Englishman is high enough to be free from their tyranny. But every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world. When he wants a thing, he never tells himself that he wants it. He waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who have got the thing he wants. Then he becomes irresistible. Like the aristocrat, he does what pleases him and grabs what he covets ; like the shopkeeper, he pursues his purpose with the industry and steadfastness that come from strong religious conviction and deep sense of moral responsibility. He is never at a loss for an effec-

tive moral attitude. As the great champion of freedom and national independence, he conquers and annexes half the world, and calls it Colonization. When he wants a new market for his adulterated Manchester goods, he sends a missionary to teach the natives the Gospel of Peace. The natives kill the missionary; he flies to arms in defence of Christianity; fights for it; conquers for it; and takes the market as a reward from heaven. In defence of his island shores, he puts a chaplain on board his ship; nails a flag with a cross on it to his top-gallant mast; and sails to the ends of the earth, sinking, burning, and destroying all who dispute the empire of the seas with him. He boasts that a slave is free the moment his foot touches British soil; and he sells the children of his poor at six years of age to work under the lash in his factories for sixteen hours a day. He makes two revolutions, and then declares war on our one in the name of law and order. There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle. He fights you on patriotic principles; he robs you on business principles; he enslaves you on imperial principles; he bullies you on manly principles; he supports his king on loyal principles and cuts off his king's head on republican principles. His watchword is always Duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side to its interest is lost. He—

This explanation of the English character will seem to some people absolutely faultless. To me it simply appeared so felicitously humorous, that I have been unable to resist the temptation of inserting it here. Now let us come to the fourth and most important play of this volume.

G. B. Shaw has defined *Candida* as a mystery; but it becomes clear upon examination that it is a comedy,

and more than this, the only real, well balanced and sane comedy that he has ever written—the most sympathetic in its contents, the most simple, the most refined in its perceptions, and the most artistic in its construction.

The Rev. James Morell is not one of those clergymen whom Shaw is accustomed to place before us. He is not the professional ecclesiastic, unctuous in manner, bigoted in thought, egotistic in character. On the contrary, he is a Christian Socialist—all absorbed in his educational mission, all enthusiasm for his propagandist work—energetic, robust, reliable, equal to telling anybody his real opinion of them, most exact and industrious in his business, and at the same time a “great baby,” slightly vain, but in rather a charming way—and madly in love with his wife.

And this latter, *Candida* by name, is a person to be envied. Intelligent, easy in her manner, witty with a perfect self-control, with the clear perception of things as they really are, which in women, when it exists, is much sharper and more intense than in men. She exercises an attraction on all who come within her circle, which is a delight to herself. But at the same time she is not a flirt. And her really superior intellect, her character full of dignity and her secure virtue, if they do not permit any vulgar courtship, can yet receive without danger the homage of a devoted affection. That is, without danger to herself—but not without danger to others. Eugene Marchbanks, for instance, has become devoted to her to such an extent that he is desperately in love. He is a boy of eighteen years, poetic, intelligent, with that certainty of the unknown and unknowable

which is peculiar to his age. But he has also the raw frankness of an Ibsenite hero, and confesses to her husband that he is in love with Candida.

Marchbanks. I love your wife.

Morell. Why, my dear child, of course you do. Everybody loves her ; they can't help it. I like it. But I say, Eugene, do you think yours is a case to be talked about? You're under twenty ; she's over thirty. Doesn't it look rather too like a case of calf love?

Marchbanks. You dare say that of her ! You think that way of the love she inspires ! It is an insult to her !

Morell. To her ! Eugene ; take care. I have been patient. I hope to remain patient. But there are some things I won't allow. Don't force me to show you the indulgence I should show to a child. Be a man.

Marchbanks. Oh, let us put aside all that cant. It horrifies me when I think of the doses of it she has had to endure in all the weary years during which you have selfishly and blindly sacrificed her to minister to your self-sufficiency —you ! who have not one thought—one sense—in common with her.

Morell remains disconcerted. Then, in a scene which is led up to by degrees in the most masterly fashion, this boy of eighteen succeeds in shaking the confidence of the good clergyman, in making him doubt whether he is really on the level of Candida, whether he can really understand, appreciate, and love her as Eugene boasts that she could be understood, appreciated, and loved—by himself. Had the whole thing then been really an illusion ? Had his whole happiness been based upon a misunderstanding ? And Candida—does she love him ? can she love him ?

The Christian Socialist begins to lose his patience,

seizes Eugene by the shoulders and threatens to put him out of the door. "I'm not afraid of you," the boy cries to him: "it's you who are afraid of me. . . . You are driving me out of the house because you daren't let her choose between your ideas and mine. You are afraid to let me see her again."

And he threatens, if Morell turns him out of the house, to refer the whole matter to Candida. "Because she will understand me, and know that I understand her." Morell, partly from fear, partly from shame, withdraws from his intention and permits Eugene Marchbanks to remain. The boy is the master of the situation. Candida treats him like a pet dog ; caresses him, torments him, chaffs him about his poetic ideals, makes him clean her lamps, help in cutting the onions and in "washing up," and by all this unconsciously increases her husband's doubts.

The situation thus becomes more and more defined, with a skill on the part of the author which is marvellous ; and the scene that follows between Candida and Morell in the second act is a little jewel.

Candida (*With curious thoughtfulness*). Yes, I feel a little jealous sometimes.

Morell (*Incredulously*). Of Prossy?

Candida (*Laughing*). No, no, no, no. Not jealous of anybody. Jealous for somebody else, who is not loved as he ought to be.

Morell. Me?

Candida. You ! Why, you're spoiled with love and worship ; you get far more than is good for you. No ; I mean Eugene.

Morell (*Startled*). Eugene !

Candida. It seems unfair that all the love should go to you,

and none to him ; although he needs it so much more than you do. (*A convulsive movement shakes him in spite of himself.*) What's the matter ? Am I worrying you ?

Morell (Hastily). Not at all. (*Looking at her with troubled intensity.*) You know that I have perfect confidence in you, *Candida*.

Candida. You vain thing ! Are you so sure of your irresistible attractions ?

Morell. *Candida*, you are shocking me. I never thought of my attractions. I thought of your goodness—your purity. That is what I confide in.

Candida. What a nasty, uncomfortable thing to say to me ! Oh, you are a clergyman, James—a thorough clergyman !

Morell (Turning away from her, heart-stricken). So Eugene says.

Candida (With lively interest, leaning over to him with her arms on his knee). Eugene's always right. He's a wonderful boy ; I have grown fonder and fonder of him all the time I was away. Do you know, James, that though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love with me ?

Morell (Grimly). Oh, he has no suspicion of it himself, hasn't he ?

Candida. Not a bit. (*She takes her arms from his knee, and turns thoughtfully, sinking into a more restful attitude with her hands in her lap.*) Some day he will know—when he is grown up and experienced, like you. And he will know that I must have known. I wonder what he will think of me then.

Morell. No evil, *Candida*. I hope and trust, no evil.

Candida (Dubiously). That will depend.

Morell (Bewildered). Depend !

Candida (Looking at him). Yes ; it will depend on what happens to him. (*He looks vacantly at her.*) Don't you see ? It will depend on how he comes to learn what love really is. I mean on the sort of woman who will teach it to him.

Morell (Quite at a loss). Yes. No. I don't know what you mean.

Candida (Explaining). If he learns it from a good woman, then it will be all right ; he will forgive me.

Morell. Forgive !

Candida. But suppose he learns it from a bad woman, as so many men do, especially poetic men, who imagine all women are angels ! Suppose he only discovers the value of love when he has thrown it away and degraded himself in his ignorance ! Will he forgive me then, do you think ?

Morell. Forgive you for what ?

Candida (Realizing how stupid he is, and a little disappointed, though quite tenderly so). Don't you understand ? (*He shakes his head. She turns to him again, so as to explain with the fondest intimacy.*) I mean, will he forgive me for not teaching him myself ? For abandoning him to the bad women for the sake of my goodness—my purity, as you call it ? Ah, James, how little you understand me, to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity ! I would give them both to poor Eugene as willingly as I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there were nothing else to restrain me. Put your trust in my love for you, James ; for if that went, I should care very little for your sermons—mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day.

And thus in three acts and twenty-four hours of time the intimately psychological tragi-comedy crosses and recrosses a delicate web of inwoven tissues, all as vaporous as mist, without episodes, without action, but with that intensity of suggestion which is given by a moment of life really lived. I have called it a tragi-comedy, because the growing anxieties of the poor husband before these vain shadows thrown by his eighteen-year old rival really require that title. In the

last scene there is a further note added. In a situation and a dialogue, in which I do not know whether to admire most the delicate humour or the tender sentiment, there is revealed to us a woman's character so elect, so refined, so sweet, that she remains as Shaw's finest creation, and perhaps one of the finest creations in contemporary drama.

Morell has gone on gradually losing his calmness and good sense, until he has at last arrived at the point of taking the matter seriously ; and Candida has now to choose between him and Eugene.

Morell (With proud humility). I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defence, my honesty of purpose for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman.

Candida (Quite quietly). And you, Eugene ? What do you offer ?

Marchbanks. My weakness ! My desolation ! My heart's need !

Candida (Impressed). That's a good bid, Eugene. Now I know how to make my choice.

(She pauses and looks curiously from one to the other, as if weighing them. Morell, whose lofty confidence has changed into heartbreaking dread at Eugene's bid, loses all power of concealing his anxiety. Eugene, strung to the highest tension, does not move a muscle.)

Morell (In a suffocated voice--the appeal bursting from the depths of his anguish). Candida !

Marchbanks (Aside, in a flash of contempt). Coward !

Candida (Significantly). I give myself to the weaker of the two.

(Eugene divines her meaning at once ; his face whitens like steel in a furnace.)

Morell (Bowing his head with the calm of collapse). I accept your sentence, *Candida*.

Candida. Do you understand, *Eugene*?

Marchbanks. Oh, I feel I'm lost. He cannot bear the burden.

Morell. (*Incredulously, raising his head with prosaic abruptness*). Do you mean me, *Candida*?

Candida (Smiling a little). Let us sit and talk comfortably over it like three friends. (*To Morell.*) Sit down, dear. (*Morell takes the chair from the fireside—the children's chair.*) Bring me that chair, *Eugene*. (*She indicates the easy chair. He fetches it silently, even with something like cold strength, and places it next Morell, a little behind him.* She sits down. *He goes to the sofa and sits there, still silent and inscrutable. When they are all settled she begins, throwing a spell of quietness on them by her calm, sane, tender tone.*) You remember what you told me about yourself, *Eugene*: how nobody has cared for you since your old nurse died; how those clever, fashionable sisters and successful brothers of yours were your mother's and father's pets; how miserable you were at Eton; how your father is trying to starve you into returning to Oxford; how you have had to live without comfort or welcome or refuge, always lonely, and nearly always disliked and misunderstood, poor boy!

Marchbanks. (*Faithful to the nobility of his lot.*) I had my books. I had Nature. And at last I met you.

Candida. Never mind that just at present. Now I want you to look at this other boy here—my boy—spoiled from his cradle. We go once a fortnight to see his parents. You should come with us, *Eugene*, and see the pictures of the hero of that household. James as a baby! the most wonderful of all babies. James holding his first school prize, won at the ripe age of eight! James as the captain of his eleven! James in his first frock coat! James under all sorts of glorious circumstances! You know how strong he is (I hope he didn't hurt you)—how clever he is—how happy! (*With*

*deepening gravity.) Ask James's mother and his three sisters what it cost to save James the trouble of doing anything but be strong and clever and happy. Ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one. Ask Prossy and Maria how troublesome the house is, even when we have no visitors to help us to slice the onions. Ask the tradesmen, who want to worry James and spoil his beautiful sermons, who it is that puts them off. When there is money to give, he gives it ; when there is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so. (With sweet irony.) And when he thought I might go away with you, his only anxiety was—what should become of me ! And to tempt me to stay he offered me (*leaning forward to stroke his hair caressingly at each phrase*) his strength for my defence, his industry for my livelihood, his position for my dignity, his—(*relenting*) ah, I am mixing up your beautiful sentences and spoiling them, am I not, darling ? (She lays her cheek fondly against his.)*

Morell (Quite overcome, kneeling beside her chair and embracing her with boyish ingenuousness). It's all true, every word. What I am you have made me, with the labour of your hands and the love of your heart. You are my wife, my mother, my sisters ; you are the sum of all loving care to me.

Candida (In his arms, smiling to Eugene). Am I your mother and sisters to you, Eugene ?

Marchbanks (Rising with a fierce gesture of disgust). Ah, never. Out, then, into the night with me !

Candida (Rising quickly and intercepting him). You are not going like that, Eugene ?

But Eugene Marchbanks does go away, carrying with him, says Shaw, his secret. What secret ? There are

no real secrets here, either for the public or for the reader. Here is a type of woman who is morally fascinating, here is Morell who is quite a human document, here is a situation wonderfully developed with all that simplicity and still repose which are the secret of the art of Ibsen—here, in a word, is a very good play. Why do I say “very good”? Because it seems to me true to life, interesting, stirring. Only here what stirs us, what excites our interest in the characters is not the usual capricious and brilliant dialectics which we have come to expect from Shaw—but the charm of sentiment. Here, then, we may fully admit that we do not know what the logic of the situation really is—and that we do not very much care. For the fact is that in the drama—as in life—what conquers us is not reason but emotion, not wisdom but generosity, not force but weakness.

Candida responds but very little to the modern ideal of woman; but this is just the very reason of her beauty and her charm. With all my natural sympathy for women’s rights and aspirations, I have always found the “feminism” which is presented on the stage absolutely detestable. It would have been quite easy for an Ibsenite author to have made of Candida one of those “personal” and “independent” women who belong only to themselves. Instead of this, Shaw—as I think you will agree—has made of her a woman whose personality, independence, and force consist in wishing and knowing how to belong to others. It is the triumph of love—of *true* love, as Candida herself has said.

In her there is something of the sweet and kindly

Solveig of *Peer Gynt*—indeed she seems almost a translation of the text into prose. Do you remember?

Peer Gynt. Then tell me what thou knowest ! Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the true man.

Solveig. In my faith, in my hope, and in my love.

Peer Gynt. My mother ; my wife ; oh, thou innocent woman ! In thy love—oh, there hide me, hide me.

Solveig. I will cradle thee, I will watch thee. Sleep and dream thou, dear my boy.

Two years after the publication of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, G. B. Shaw collected into volume form two comedies which had been already produced, and a fantastic play which was unfavourable for stage production, under the curious title of *Three Plays for Puritans*.

The author gives his reasons for this title in a most brilliant preface, in which he declares himself sick and tired of comedies and dramas whose interest centres in the sexual problem, which, in fact, seek for their success by tickling the sensual appetites of the public ; which develop stories, episodes, and scenes of love. He therefore wished to write three comedies which should not be “ instruments of a systematic idolatry of sexualism,” and which would bring into the theatre “ the rich English evangelical merchant, the man who when in need of sensuality practises it, and does not content himself with voluptuous and romantic ideas.”

The first of these three plays for Puritans, produced with success in a London suburban theatre in the autumn of 1899, is considered one of the best that Shaw has ever written. That is the opinion of Brandes,

who considers *The Devil's Disciple* "a masterpiece, whether it is considered from the psychological or the purely theatrical point of view. Well played, it ought to bring a fortune to any manager." In fact, at Vienna, where it was produced under the title of *Ein Teufelskerl*, it had a splendid success.

Its story is soon told.

We find ourselves in America, in 1877, during the War of Independence. Dick Dudgeon is a rebel who boasts himself to be the Devil's disciple. But, as a matter of fact, though he is supposed to live a century earlier, he is really and simply a disciple of Shaw ; contemptuous of all sentimentalism, practical, independent, coldly rational, full of resource and spirit, of paradoxes and shrewd mother-wit. King George's soldiers are looking for him to hang him. He is in the house of the pastor Anderson, who has also secret sympathies with the cause of the American rebellion. The pastor goes out to help Dick's mother, who is dying, and leaves the Devil's disciple with his wife, Mrs. Anderson, who detests him for his rakish reputation, but who, to satisfy her husband's wishes, tries to entertain him by offering him tea.

In a few minutes we get a good deal of chatter between these two, when suddenly there is a loud knock at the door, and a patrol of soldiers enters to arrest the pastor Anderson, on the suspicion of his favouring the rebel cause. The soldiers, who do not know the pastor, arrest Dick in his place ; and Dick, to Mrs. Anderson's astonishment, lets himself be taken, and prepares to mount the scaffold in the pastor's place. The young woman is first astounded,

and then struck with admiration by such unexpected heroism. "If you are my wife"—says Dick to her in a low voice, and as if joking—"you ought at least to give me one kiss; otherwise our parting might seem unnatural." And Mrs. Anderson throws her arms about his neck before Dick is marched off by the soldiers. When Anderson returns and hears what has happened, he takes all the money that is in the house, his weapons, saddles a horse and goes off. Where has he gone? Has he fled for his life? And that without a word for the man who had sacrificed himself for his sake? without a thought save that of saving his own skin? And Mrs. Anderson begins to see only too clearly that her husband is a coward!

In the last act, after a court-martial, which is a very fine satire on certain military tribunals of our own time and knowledge, Dick is fairly on the way to be hanged. Mrs. Anderson has now but one thought and one affection—these are all centred in the Devil's Disciple, whom but the day before she had hated. Is she now in love with the same man? But now it is Dick who disillusioned her; for he is a true Puritan, and has no romantic metaphysics.

"If I said," he tells her, "to please you—that I did what I did ever so little for your sake, I lied, as men always lie to women. You know how much I have lived with worthless men—aye, and worthless women too. Well, they could all have risen to some sort of goodness and kindness when they were in love (*the word love comes from him with true Puritan scorn*). That has taught me to set very little store by the goodness that only comes out red-hot. What I did last night,

I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband, or (*ruthlessly*) for you (*she droops, stricken*) as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest ; all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not ; I see myself as a fool for my pains ; but I could not and I cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature ; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows."

He will die, then, without even the note of poetry, like a dog. But no ! He is not the real hero—for this last we have to wait till the last act. Then we find him in the pastor Anderson, who has put himself at the head of his fellow-citizens, has beaten the English, and come to save Dick and to proclaim the freedom of America. "It is in the hour of trial," he says, "that a man finds his true profession. This foolish young man (*placing his hand on Richard's shoulder*) boasted himself the Devil's Disciple ; but when the hour of trial came to him, he found that it was his destiny to suffer and be faithful to the death. I thought myself a decent minister of the gospel of peace ; but when the hour of trial came to me, I found that it was my destiny to be a man of action, and that my place was amid the thunder of the captains and the shouting. So I am starting life at fifty as Captain Anderson of the Springtown Militia ; and the Devil's Disciple here will start presently as the Reverend Richard Dudgeon, and wag his pow in my old pulpit, and give good advice to this silly, sentimental little wife of mine."

But the little wife cannot love any one but a hero ;

and the hero is now her own husband. "Promise me you will never tell him," she whispers to Dick. "Don't be afraid," replies the Devil's Disciple.

The play has not the psychological *finesse* and simplicity of construction of *Candida*; but it is interesting, lively, full of dramatic movement. The story is old, but the types are new. The historic background is treated with a terrible but stupendous irony. The characters—except perhaps the principal figure—are human, logical, sincere. Besides, *The Devil's Disciple* is one of the few of Shaw's works which can be and has been produced on the stage with success.

I shall pass by the other two plays contained in this volume—*Cæsar* and *Cleopatra* and *Captain Brass-bound's Conversion*—because, even apart from the fact that to treat them in a satisfactory manner would be too long, they are not among our author's most brilliant and characteristic works. *Cæsar* and *Cleopatra* is a fantastic parody of the classical in the genre of *La Belle Hélène* or of *Orphée aux Enfers*, full of wit, of go, of vivacity, of satire, of sophistry, and things and ideas which are possible and impossible. But it ought, above all, to be a Puritan Play: and therefore *Cæsar* and *Cleopatra* have a great deal to do in five long acts to avoid falling in love with each other!

It therefore follows that the *Cæsar* of G. B. S., superior to all the temptations of love and a master of Puritanism, is really a far higher artistic type than that of Shakespeare. This is at any rate what Shaw affirms, without any false modesty, in his own preface. Shakespeare, he continues, though a profound student of human weakness, never grasped the human force of the

Cæsarean type. His Lear is a masterpiece ; his Caesar a poor creation.

“ Better than Shakespeare ! ” Is Shaw really this ? The rivalry between the Elizabethan Æschylus and the Victorian Euripides has appealed to the English in their instincts of sport. They even made a “ *revue* ” of it at the Haymarket, with a comic libel action brought by Shakespeare against Shaw. The jury gave a verdict for the plaintiff—with one farthing damages. But even here Shaw complained of being misunderstood. He gave a lecture, in April of 1900, in the Town Hall of Kensington, to explain his views on this matter. To him too Shakespeare, it appears, is a great artist. In “ manner and art ” no one could write better for the theatre than he has done—but as a thinker he is very weak. His characters possess neither religion, nor politics, nor conscience, nor hope, nor convictions of any kind ; and their outlook on life is that of a vulgar pessimism. Such is the Shavian heterodoxy. But where he has really reason on his side is in his revolt against the Shakespeare idolatry, with which some English want to make out of the tragedian of Stratford a kind of infallible Deity, to put his work on the same level as the Bible—“ in the proper spirit ”—that is, without venturing on any sort of criticism. This sort of thing, after all, is very general all over the world. And we may possess our souls in patience when these idols are called Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe . . . but have we not now in London a new cult—the Shavian idolatry ?

I remember having once been present at a reception at the Playgoers’ Club, at which Mr. Osman

Edwards gave us an address on "The Superiority of Shaw to Shakespeare." He there showed that Shakespeare was a bad dramatist, because he was a great poet; he noted for our guidance that his humour was vulgar and his tragedy puerile, and proved that Shaw was far superior to him in his realism, in his critical sense of life, in the depth of his thought, in his stage technique. . . .

. . . At this point G. B. S., who was among the audience, rose to his feet and asked our permission to be allowed to say a few words in favour of his great rival.

The moment and the idea were worthy of the speaker!

After having condemned in his preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* the eternal erotic *motif* on the contemporary stage, G. B. S. naturally felt inclined himself to try the same *motif*, but to obtain new effects from his own one-stringed instrument. With *Man and Superman*, published in 1903, he leaves almost entirely the field of drama, in which he ought to have made a profound and lasting impression, to wander off into a dense grey mist of tedious idealism. To be fair to him, he honestly warns the reader of what is before him in his sub-title. *Man and Superman* is "A Comedy and a Philosophy." But the only feature of comedy which we can trace in it is the scenic construction and the form of development; all the rest is an abyss of social metaphysics, while our author pops up occasionally from time to time to bring us a gem or two out of the deep. It is a pity that these appearances are so infrequent!

But this volume is important to all who wish to know the writer, because it contains within itself the quint-

essence of "Shawism." There is first of all an epistolary preface dedicated to A. B. Walkley, *The Times* critic, of thirty-seven pages in length. Then comes the "Comedy and Philosophy," and finally an appendix, which contains the vade-mecum or manual of the Perfect Revolutionist, and a collection of heterodox maxims.

In his preface, which jumps about from one argument to another, touching by the way on every conceivable subject, Shaw explains to us why he has written a play on the theme of Don Juan without including its hero, or at any rate only introducing him in a kind of interlude as a spirit in Hell. Don Juan has been left out, says Shaw, because there was no way to be found of bringing him in. At the present day there are no more Don Juans. In the duel between the sexes man is no longer the conqueror. He does not pay court, it is no longer he who seduces; on the contrary, he is seduced into marriage, and compelled by nature (or by the "life force," as the author prefers to call it) to fulfil his troublesome but necessary task of—peopling the world !

So that while Walkley had one day suggested to him the idea of writing a play upon the theme of Don Juan, Shaw, *more suo*, has written one upon Doña Juana !

It would be as difficult to describe briefly this "play" as it would be impossible to synthetize the seeds of philosophy scattered broadcast through its brilliant intellectual medley. But its main thread is a remorseless hunt for a husband. John Tanner is being pursued by Ann Whitefield, who, however, in contrast to her male prototype, has one love alone in all her

life, to which she is constantly and almost tediously faithful. Tanner does all within his power to escape ; but he finally succumbs in Spain after a last desperate attempt at flight in a motor-car ! Such is the main thread of the story ; but there are an infinitude of secondary episodes and characters, who all assist in strengthening the fundamental conception of the work, in displaying the stupidity of existing theories of life, the imbecility of marriage as it now is, and the absurdity of the conventions which govern at present the sexual relations.

There is, above all, a long *intermezzo*, in which the spirit of the original Don Juan appears in the company of the Devil and of Doña Ana de Ulloa, in order to talk to us very brilliantly about man, love, political institutions, the boredom of Heaven and the disadvantages of Hell, and of this, that, and the other with a prolixity which, as he is now dead, ought to have been equal to getting through not merely time, but eternity !

And the meaning of this strange title?—the gentle reader may ask of me. The reason of the title is given by Don Juan in his kind visit to earth to which I have just alluded ; but yet more fully by the author in his preface, and in the *Revolutionist's Handbook*. What we want—he tells us—is to get rid of all the pruderies, all the conventionalism, all the unrealities which in the actual state of matrimonial legislation, and from the absurd prejudices and conventions of mankind, limit the functions of Nature, and make of the union of two human creatures an affair of foolish sentiment and romantic formality. It is only by this change

for the better that Nature will achieve her purpose of evolving the Superman, or that higher type of humanity to which Shaw, and in fact all the world, really aspires.

For Shaw, when he speaks of the Superman, connotes a democracy of Supermen ; his *Uebermensch* is thus King Demos. But this modern monarch is not yet born, and even in the field of the imagination is only to be found in that planet, beyond Sirius, which Wells has described in his *Modern Utopia*. For him to be born, to grow and prosper, there is needed a revolution in the relations between man and woman ; we should need to abolish the present conjugal laws, and think out a sort of raising of human stock on a scientific basis, arranged and controlled by the State. The idea is as old as the Republic of Plato. But the novelty of Shaw's treatment consists in the methods which he indicates for its realization. This method is unique in its simplicity—it is to announce a congress for the discussion of the subject, in which both sexes should take part !

In the meantime, while he is still waiting for this congress, Shaw, who does not care to waste his time, has descended from his social empirics and his Supermen of the future into the midst of the plain men and facts of to-day. On November 1st, 1904, he produced at the Court Theatre *John Bull's Other Island*.

Broadbent is a typical John Bull. With a natural fund of good sense, with untiring energy, incurable optimism, with an absolute incapacity for understanding or feeling sympathy with any other ideas outside his own, or for grasping other people's point of view, he

is the very incarnation of the “middle-class” Englishman.

But don’t let us forget that Broadbent is a Liberal, in fact the very emblem and type of the old English Liberalism. Upon his lips there blossom all the catchwords of the party—Free Trade, Home Rule, defence of oppressed races, cult of the Grand Old Man’s memory, and Reform. His political faith is based upon the magic virtues of the “Great Liberal Party”; if any one is poorly—either morally or physically—Broadbent is prepared to console and encourage him by the assurance that everything will be different after the next General Election!

We mentioned that he is a Home Ruler. Hence, at the very beginning of the play, we find him expressing to his friend and partner, Larry Doyle, his desire to visit and study Ireland—John Bull’s other island. Larry does not seem much taken with the idea; he is an Anglicized Irishman, and has very little tenderness for his native land. Broadbent, to get over his objections, appeals to his Irish heart.

“Let my heart alone,” replies Larry, “an Irishman’s heart only exists in his imagination.”

Broadbent next tries to explain the pessimism of his friend by the Celtic temperament.

“The Celtic temperament,” again replies Larry, “has nothing to do with our national melancholy. It is the climate, the country, and its monotonous surroundings.”

“That may be,” responds Broadbent; “but at any rate you have the gifts of song and fluent speech.”

But Larry is still unconvinced, and replies that the

gift of song is due mainly to a frugal diet, and that of fluent speech still more to the exaggerated accounts of English humorists !

However, the two come at last to an understanding, and leave for the shores of John Bull's other island ; in Act II we are at Roscullen, a little Irish hamlet. And here the satire becomes merciless and mordant, without pity either for the English or for the Irish. Types and incidents from the Green Island are put in the most comic light ; there is the peasant with his still Pagan traditions ; there is the priest who condemns this superstition, but has worse ones of his own, which draw their origin from his Catholic Obscurantism ; there is Keegan, a man of God who passes for a lunatic, a mystic who talks to the grasshoppers, calls the ass and the pig his brothers, believes like a Buddhist in metamorphosis, and asserts that Hell is on the earth !

Then we have to take part in a village conclave, consisting of Larry's own father, the priest, and two peasants, who have all formed the scheme of sending Larry Doyle to Parliament. Larry's ideas are by no means theirs—but that is of minor importance !

“What really matters,” says one of them, “is to create a new class of Irish members who can afford to live in London at their own expense until Home Rule is proclaimed” (a nasty knock this, by the way, for the existing Irish members who live in London at the expense of the—often poverty-stricken—electors!).

But Larry flatly refuses to hear the deputation, and they next turn their attention to Broadbent, who, in his enthusiasm for Home Rule, accepts the offer, and com-

mences his electoral campaign on the spot by enumerating all the catchwords of the "Great Liberal Party." The questions of "Landlordism," of the Irish Catholic Church, of a National University in Dublin, are discussed up and down by varous characters, with as many hits at the Irish themselves as at the English. Deliciously witty is the dialogue between a Roscullen peasant and Broadbent's servant, who is a London cockney *pur sang*. This last tries to convince the peasant that the sufferings of the Irish are no worse than those of the poor in the East End of London ; but—he then adds—these latter can at least thank God that they are free ! "Eh !" says the hardheaded old peasant, "there's no need to put a muzzle on sheep !"

And so the play runs its course for four acts, without any plot, without any connecting story, without any end, in the midst of a medley of comic episodes, of witty sayings, of satirical utterances, but all in a key of sceptical but most witty criticism, of easy banter. *John Bull's Other Island* might have been the *Rabagas* of the English drama. No playwright could have been better situated than Shaw himself to give us the satirical comedy of Anglo-Irish politics, and to find in such a well-worn subject as Home Rule the elements of a most inspiring farce. And yet, in spite of all these advantages, he has failed. The play pleased English audiences because it afforded them food for mirth at the expense of the Irish. But from an artistic point of view it is undoubtedly inferior to *Candida*, *The Devil's Disciple*, or *Arms and the Man*. It represents Shaw's first success before a general public, but it also, in my opinion, marks a transition stage

towards a new and less happy phase of his dramatic industry. In his earlier plays, and even up to that portion of *Man and Superman* capable of representation on the stage, there was always at least a semblance of plot and of human interest ; but in *John Bull's Other Island*, *Major Barbara*, and *The Doctor's Dilemma* we are treated to nothing but chaotic and wearisome discussions. What purpose would be served by attempting a summary of work of this description ? Any such summary must inevitably be unfair to the author, since it could convey no idea of the two redeeming features of these plays—their dialogue and their wit. In *The Doctor's Dilemma* the author's intentions must have aimed at something more than this. His friend William Archer, who is at great pains to preserve in him the artist and the playwright, ever somewhat stifled beneath the weight of the philosopher, had urged him—with the intention of compelling him to seriousness—to attempt a death-scene in this play. So he has killed Dubedat, but in a manner so unconvincing and so devoid of feeling, that the audience is left in doubt whether that character has really drawn his last breath, or whether he has merely closed his eyes in order to prepare a fresh trick at the expense of those standing around his bed. No, let us have no more death-scenes from Shaw ! He is an Immortal and therefore incapable of even understanding the nature of death. Let us, rather, make up our minds to accept what he is able to give us, and to take him for what he is.

He undoubtedly possesses a brilliant genius, whose originality is sometimes almost too marked. He has a

keen and spontaneous sense of humour ; he can, when he so wishes, write dialogue which is sparkling with wit ; he is full of vivacity, of the charm of the unexpected ; he has plenty to tell us which, even if it is sometimes rough and unpleasant, always reveals a generous ideality of nature—in a word, he is an artist who, if incomplete, still possesses genius.

Yet all these good qualities have not succeeded in making of G. B. S. the playwright that he might be and ought to be. And this is only to be explained by the want of balance of which he is a victim. In Shaw the rational and intellectual faculties not merely predominate, but dominate him despotically ; the emotional qualities are either absent or—since some parts of his work betray their presence—are almost completely stifled.

In other words, Shaw is no poet. He who but a short time since was his greatest living rival, Henrik Ibsen, was great because, beyond all other reasons, he was a poet. But where in all the works of Shaw will you find one single throb of poetry ? In him sentiment is dumb, and it is only the brain that speaks.

The cerebral activity of Shaw is in fact absolutely phenomenal. In his brain ideas and fragments of ideas dance and whirl like sparks from red-hot iron when it is beaten on the anvil. The flow is continuous, exhausting, even tedious. His works, stimulating as at first they are, end by wearying us—because in these mental pyrotechnics we seek vainly for the clear, harmonious design of a fundamental thought. Often this thought is there, but we lose it amid these brilliant fireworks.

It is just this quality of Shaw's mind—which might be useful and even precious to the critic—which has been fatal to the artist. He has introduced into his plays ideas, sophisms, philosophic formulæ, paradoxes, and gossip. And though this might have been merely a consequence of his own temperament, he has done it for the most part on purpose. "The only artists," Shaw has said, "that I take at all seriously are the artist-philosophers." And the only plays which seem possible to him are philosophic comedies. The proposition is not worth our discussing seriously.

G. B. Shaw, as Walkley has cleverly put it in *The Times*, is, above all, explicative; for him a play must be a work of art if it is a work of thought. It is because he has thoughts, ideas, genius—he tells us with his habitual modesty—that he is misunderstood by the English public: he is accused of writing interminable prefaces to his plays, but "I write prefaces as Dryden did," he says, "and treatises as Wagner, because I can; and I would give half a dozen of Shakespear's plays for one of the prefaces he ought to have written." But it does not seem to have ever occurred to him that these observations of his constitute a very direct and serious criticism of his own work. Quite true it is that other writers cannot write such prefaces as his. But that is just one of their merits. They write plays instead! The two things are quite distinct.

Carlo Goldoni, for instance, created an Italian comedy which is still a living force, without a single preface; while Carlo Gozzi, who, if not actually in prefatory

form, wrote, re-wrote, and gossipped so freely about his own plays and his own artistic ideals, gave us only fairy tales which, theatrically speaking, have been dead for more than a century. It is just upon the stage that the subjectivity of the author himself ought to be the least apparent. Instead of this, in Shaw's plays he is always upon the stage himself, whether in the uniform of a soldier or in the jacket of a rebel, in the black coat of a clergyman or the petticoats of a woman.

This—judging from the artist's standpoint—is the capital defect of his dramatic work. His men and women have all the same form; if men, that of psychological woman-tamers; if women, that of cold and sarcastic contempt for all the desires of man to win their affection or interest. And men and women, heroes and heroines, always come before us in these plays, not as themselves, but as exponents of the ideas, the caprices, the paradoxes of G. B. Shaw. These ideas, these brilliant paradoxes are before us from the first act to the last curtain. They jump up out of the footlights, they fall from the flies, they waltz about the whole theatre, electrifying and intellectualizing its atmosphere.

This is what William Archer calls "Shawism"—a thing which out of the negation of Romanticism and Sentimentalism has ended by becoming the caricature of Rationalism; and this is also what has ruined Shaw as a playwright.

On the stage—and we may believe it to be so in real life—he sees nothing but expressions of ideas and syllogisms. A clever paradox is always his *Deus ex*

machina. It seems impossible that an artist who could write a play like *Candida*, and such good scenes and characters elsewhere, should in this way amuse himself with his own mental creations, breaking them to pieces —like boys with their toys—to fill them with *Maxims for Revolutionists*.

Shaw's dramatic work is pure journalism, destined to enjoy a certain vogue and then to be swallowed up in the deep pit of oblivion. Nor should I be surprised if this vogue of his were already on the decline. In Germany and Austria, where both the directors and the frequenters of the theatre are animated by artistic intentions, and where there is considerable curiosity as to the works of foreign authors, people were hardly aware of the existence of Shaw until some of his works were translated and performed. They obtained a certain measure of success which was largely due to that curiosity; but Shaw, who has a genius for self-advertisement, was prompt in explaining to his compatriots the true inwardness of his success. "Why are my plays popular in Germany, and not in England?" he modestly replied to a reporter's query. "Because the Englishman expects the ideas of a man of genius to be like his own; while the German expects a writer of genius to express opinions somewhat different from those of the generality of mankind." This explanation was given by Shaw before his plays had obtained success in America; now that they have obtained favour with the Americans, he will have to find a fresh one! In the meantime, however, the British public has been stirred. By dint of hearing that Shaw is a genius, and in face of the danger of seeing him

appropriated by Germany—like the manufacture of aniline dyes—the British public has been induced to open its eyes and clap its hands !

The popularity of Shaw's dramatic works in England dates only from November, 1904 ; that is to say, from the production of *John Bull's Other Island* at the Court Theatre. It has, no doubt, been enhanced by the successive appearances of *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, and *The Doctor's Dilemma*, but I do not think that it can be lasting. Shaw, with all his wit and all his go, already shows signs of becoming terribly monotonous.

When all have passed into the limbo of oblivion—author, public, and reputation alike—some critic yet unborn, discussing the English drama of our day, will write somewhat in this style :—

“ There was also one Shaw, or, rather, two Shaws—one worse than the other. The first wrote several works—*Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Candida*, and *The Devil's Disciple*, for instance—which, notwithstanding certain defects, were undoubtedly works of art, and may even be called genuine drama, because they brought upon the stage human types and situations. But Fate willed that there should be implanted at birth in the nature of Shaw I certain germs, which arriving at maturity produced Shaw II, who, instead of cultivating and bringing to perfection his artistic gifts, allowed them to become completely atrophied, while he endowed the stage with discussions and homilies in dialogue form, instead of with comedies and dramas ! A great pity this ! for both in Shaw I and Shaw II there were the makings of a writer of talent, who

might have left us—in the place of all this stuff which is now read by nobody, because it interests nobody—a living and realistic picture of the society of his own times, which we could still admire and enjoy—even at the present day."

CHAPTER V

FROM STRATFORD-ON-AVON TO DRURY LANE

DURING the last fortnight in April—when the larches in Windsor Forest are putting forth their first tender green shoots, and the *Times* is inditing its annual leader on the first nightingale of the season—the memory of the Bard, too, blooms afresh and waxes green at Stratford-on-Avon.

Pilgrims flock thither in their hundreds and thousands from every part of the globe—especially from the New World—as it were to a fashionable watering-place. And the town extends to them a fitting reception.

Stratford is not one of those numerous English provincial towns where, if the traveller arrive on market-day, he finds a good “market dinner,” with a clay pipe presented gratis to each guest; while on any other day in the week his modest request for refreshment is received by mine host with a stare of bewilderment and annoyance.

Stratford has graduated with distinction in the Swiss national art of receiving, entertaining, and—fleecing the unwary foreigner! At the railway station innumerable cabs, carriages, and hotel omnibuses meet every

train. The Shakespeare Hotel, with its five gables, is fitted up with elegance, comfort, and even poetry. Each of its rooms bears, instead of a prosaic number, the title of one of Shakespeare's plays. That of the dining-room, *As You Like It*, is the least satisfactory to the traveller unaccustomed to Anglo-Saxon cooking !

But one does not go to Stratford for the sole purpose of eating or even of drinking—whatever may be the opinion of a certain brewer who, next to Shakespeare, is the magnate of the place. Leaving his hotel in the morning in the same spirit of devotion in which at Florence he would set forth in search of the house of Dante, the visitor—as the first stage in his pilgrimage—invariably repairs to the cottage where the poet was born. Henley Street is not far off, and half-way along it rises the sanctuary. “Rises,” indeed, by a figure of speech; since it consists of a modest, low, whitewashed cottage, with Elizabethan open timber-work, serving at once for ornament and support. The cottages on either side have been demolished, so that the tiny fabric might be isolated, and thereby run less risk of fire.

Here John Shakespeare dwelt and carried on his trade in wool and gloves, and here William was born towards the end of April, 1564—the exact date is not known, but from the 20th to the 25th it is quite safe to toast the poet's immortal memory ! The aged custodian points out the very room in which the author of *Hamlet* first saw the light, which must have entered then as now by certain dull little windows, evidently constructed more with a view to keeping out the cold than of

admitting the sunshine. The cottage has two stories. On the ground-floor John Shakespeare carried on his business, while his family occupied the floor above. The rooms are few in number, and are reached by a dark and precipitous staircase. Some of them contain no furniture or other relics; nothing is visible but bare, poverty-stricken walls and blackened hearths. In others there are displayed, in glass cases, rare editions of the poet's works, and many curios of at least questionable interest and authenticity. Finally, there is a worm-eaten old school bench, on which—by a slight exercise of faith—you can imagine a certain small boy seated, deep in the study of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, during the hours in which he was not more joyously engaged in robbing the orchard! Now the said orchard has undergone transformation into a charming garden, wherein have been planted the various trees and flowers whose names recur from time to time in the tragedies, comedies, or sonnets of the poet.

In this cottage, where the pilgrim now finds little more than he himself carries thither, Shakespeare grew from happy childhood into a youth which was clouded by the growing financial embarrassments of the family, whose substance was wasted by its head in continual litigation.

The school where, under the guidance of good Master Roche, he learned more than is generally supposed, was not far off, and is still to be seen in Church Street, all covered with ivy and creepers.

“And what about the butcher's shop?” This is the invariable question put by pilgrims hailing from Chicago. Where, indeed, is the butcher's shop where

the youthful Shakespeare, compelled to cut short his studies in order to earn a livelihood, used to kill bullocks in "high style," according to the tradition bequeathed to us by the antiquary John Aubrey—pronouncing a neatly turned elegy over each victim? No, the butcher's shop has disappeared. Possibly it never existed!

But if you do not happen to hail from Chicago, and are anxious to explore, in their proper chronological order, the traces left by the poet in Stratford and its neighbourhood, then—after a visit to the cottage where he was born, and the Grammar School where he was educated—you must leave the town, and walk the mile or so which divides it from the little village of Shottery. It is a short and delightful walk, amidst peaceful and idyllic scenery.

Stratford, which numbered in Shakespeare's time about 1300 inhabitants, and now boasts a population of between nine and ten thousand, is situated at the point where the ancient Roman road from London to Chester crossed the Avon; we are here in the Midland county of Warwickshire, but not in the Black Country—that smoky, populous, and noisy stronghold of modern industrialism—which only commences at Birmingham, twenty miles farther north. The outskirts of green patriarchal England still enwrap the ancient town, and stretching northwards beyond her melt imperceptibly away into the domain of coal and iron; while the smoke that placidly rises in unbroken vertical lines from invisible roofs in the valley of the Avon, and slowly spreads in lingering, drifting, dissolving wreaths upon the balmy Spring air, breathes an

Arcadian sense of calm repose and sweet domestic bliss.

The fields and meadows are deserted, and the foot-paths wind and re-wind their solitary way across the turf, as though pursuing some melancholy train of thought. The white highways roll on and on without a living soul or house in sight till they melt into the haze of unknown distances. The deciduous oaks, the beeches, and the tall elms, with their spreading branches still destitute of leaves, stand out from the carpet of velvety green in black and mysterious patches; while the low, undulating hills wind in gentle swelling curves, until they lose themselves in the Vale of the Horse.

It is a landscape in half-tones, in half-lights, in half-shadows; so vague and indeterminate in its outlines, so merged in the grey atmosphere that envelops it, as to lose almost all semblance of reality—a landscape which stretches before one, and in which one moves and feels alive and awake, and yet which one seems to have called up in a dream from some dim recess of memory.

This poetic region is thickly strewn, within a narrow compass, with memories of Shakespeare. There is shown at Wilmcote an ancient farmhouse, situated on the border of a dense wood, and the pilgrim is told that it was there the glover and tanner, John Shakespeare, came to court Mary Arden, the fair maiden who was destined to become the mother of the poet. There is no doubt that they were married at the little church of Aston Cantlow, not far away. To Kenilworth Mistress Shakespeare probably took little William to see the magnificent festivities held there in honour of

Queen Elizabeth, to which Oberon alludes in the second act of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. At Rowington the poet is reputed by tradition to have written *As You Like It*; at Billesley Hall a room is pointed out in which he once slept.

But Shottery is the object of our quest. It is a tiny village, or hamlet, like so many others scattered all over Warwickshire, within a girdle of gardens and hedges, neat and clean. Here there still exists a stone cottage with a thatched and gabled roof, half hidden beneath a tangle of creepers, which four centuries ago was the home of Anne Hathaway.

The latter was about eight years older than William, but this did not prevent his marrying her in November, 1582, when he was not yet nineteen. In the following May, Anne presented him with a daughter—Susanna. But little or nothing is known of his new family circumstances, or of the years that he subsequently spent at Stratford. According to some, William discharged the functions of a lawyer's clerk; according to others, he earned his living as a schoolmaster. In any case his earnings must have been small, if we are to lend credence to the tradition which represents him at this period of life to have been a poacher.

The schoolmaster is even said once to have been caught by the forester of Sir Thomas Lucy in the act of unlawfully slaying a deer. Sir Thomas is related to have inflicted condign punishment upon the offender, whereupon William avenged himself by means of a biting satirical ballad—his first poetic attempt!—and the noble knight retaliated by increasing the dose, and having him whipped! In the neighbourhood of

Charlecote the pilgrim is shown a fence beneath a terrace, and is told: "This is where he was surprised by the forester. . . . And that is Charlecote House, the residence of Sir Thomas, still standing, and one of the finest Elizabethan mansions in existence."

Whether this story be true or false, it is certain that about 1586 the youthful Shakespeare considered a change of air desirable, and that he took the road to Banbury—celebrated in English nursery lore—which is also the road to London! During the ten years that follow, no trace of the poet can be found in Stratford. Yet doubtless he more than once made the three days' journey from London to his native place to see the old mother whom he adored, his wife, his daughters Susanna and Judith, and little Hamnet; but these were probably flying visits. It was during these ten years that the ex-schoolmaster and poacher developed into an actor and author—that Shakespeare became Shakespeare. The record of those ten years is indelibly engraved upon the works that have rendered him immortal.

But after 1596, when he had already amassed a fortune which was considerable for those days, he reappears from time to time at Stratford. He relieves his father from his financial embarrassments, buys land, and invests his capital in various ways in his native town and its neighbourhood; he brings an action against his insolvent debtors, and purchases, for £60, the finest house in Stratford, New Place, whither he finally retired in 1613, to enjoy in peace the competence acquired on the London stage. His only son, Hamnet, died young; but Shakespeare took a

great interest in the future of his two daughters, the elder of whom, Susanna, married in 1607 the physician John Hall—and had a daughter Elizabeth, the poet's only grandchild—while the younger married in 1616 a certain Thomas Quiney. The Bard is said to have participated in the nuptial festivities of the latter with an even greater degree of *abandon* than the occasion warranted!

Shakespeare did not long enjoy the repose so ardently desired, for on April 23rd, 1616, he died at New Place, and on the 25th was buried in Trinity Church—the final stage of the annual pilgrimage to Stratford-on-Avon.

The church, dating from the fourteenth century, is early English, or Perpendicular, in style, and stands on the right bank of the Avon, with its churchyard and some buildings of a monastic character adjoining. The river, at this point broad, placid, and clear, flows picturesquely along one side, and beyond the river stretches a wide sweep of smiling meadows.

In this church—where the font is still preserved in which Shakespeare was baptized—within the chancel is the poet's tomb, with its epitaph composed by himself:

Good frend, for Iesus sake forbear
To digg the dust encloased heare.
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones,
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

During the last fortnight in April the tomb is buried beneath hundreds of flower-wreaths. In a niche above is the bust placed there by the poet's family six years after his death. Originally it was coloured, and was supposed faithfully to record Shakespeare as his contemporaries

knew him. In 1793 the Vandal who was then Vicar gave it a coat of whitewash, but the colours were restored in 1861. What strikes one in the bust—as a work of art exceedingly feeble in execution—is the exceptional loftiness of the domed forehead. The eyes are bright chestnut; the hair and beard brown; the doublet is scarlet beneath a loose, black sleeveless cape. The hands, one of which holds a quill pen, rest upon a cushion, beneath which may be read an indifferent Latin inscription comparing William Shakespeare to Nestor in wisdom, to Socrates in intellect, and to Virgil in art. Adjoining the poet's tomb, and also within the chancel, are four others—that of his wife, who survived him seven years; those of his elder daughter Susanna and her husband, Dr. Hall, and finally that of Thomas Nash, who married Shakespeare's granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall. The latter left a widow, contracted a second marriage with Sir John Barnard, and dying without issue, the direct line of the poet's descendants ended with her in 1670. Judith, Shakespeare's second daughter, lived to the age of seventy-seven, but had lost all her children twenty years previously to her death.

In 1877 there was also erected on the bank of the Avon the Shakespeare Memorial, a heavy-looking building in doubtful taste, combining all the different styles of Tudor architecture. The Memorial building contains a library of over eight thousand volumes, chiefly relating to the poet, a gallery of portraits and pictures on Shakespearian subjects by Romney, Millais, Sir T. Lawrence, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Zuccarelli, and other artists, and a theatre capable of seating

eight hundred spectators, where every year, during the festival in the month of April, F. R. Benson and his company perform some six or seven of the poet's plays. Pilgrims who have wandered about Stratford all day in pursuit of the traces of a dead Past, lifeless and almost obliterated by the lapse of ages, gather in the evening at this theatre, and here at last find something which Time has not only respected, but has even rendered more animated, more lofty, and more luminous—the imperishable art of the English Æschylus.

This art, so prized and exalted during the poet's lifetime, in the first two decades of the seventeenth century—which represent the most fertile and glorious period of English drama—experienced fortunes which varied with the changes of time and taste. Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I all held the Shakespearian drama in high honour. Prynne, who in his *Histriomastix* ventured to condemn from a Puritan point of view the performance of stage plays, had his ears cropped in 1634 by order of the King. But this was one of the first cases of Puritan extravagance, and one of the last manifestations of Stuart tyranny. Puritanism triumphed, and a few years later Cromwell cut off, not the King's ears, but his head !

During the Civil War and under the Protectorate the Puritans kept the theatres closed, and Shakespeare fell completely into oblivion. After the Restoration, from 1660 until the latter years of the century, his plays once more occupied the stage, but in artistically adapted, condensed, and retouched. The public taste was at a very low ebb, and Shakespeare did not

again became popular in England until about the middle of the eighteenth century.

On the evening of October 9th, 1741, a hitherto unknown actor who had always previously played in the provinces, appeared in the character of Richard III at Goodman's Fields, a small theatre in the East End of London. His success was so great, that in the course of a few weeks the public had deserted the two "patent" theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and flocked to the before-named plebeian quarter to applaud Shakespeare and—David Garrick.

The directors of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, concerned at this competition, intrigued at Court until they succeeded in closing Goodman's Fields. But they could not banish the offending actor from the stage. David Garrick, at once the greatest of English tragedians and the most versatile of English comedians, the cult of whose memory survives in London to this day after the lapse of a century and a half, in 1747 set foot in triumph on the boards of that same Drury Lane, one of the two "patent" theatres, and sent the public into ecstasies. His Hamlet, his Othello, his Lear rank among the most superb interpretations of the Shakespearean repertory ever conceived—a repertory owing its intermittent revivals and its vogue, not to the influence of criticism or the demands of the public, but to the advent of this or that actor of dominating personality and talent.

Such actors were John Kemble and his sister Sarah Siddons, both reared in the school of Garrick, who secured a fresh run of popularity for Shakespeare's works during the period between 1783 and 1816. Next,

from 1820 to 1850, came the turn of Kean and Macready, especially famous in the parts of Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Julius Cæsar, Coriolanus, King John, Richard III, and Othello.

But from this epoch onward, England entered again upon one of her periodical recrudescences of Puritanism. Queen Victoria did not approve of ladies attending the theatre. Good Englishwomen should think of nothing but their homes, babies, and plum-pudding ! The religious associations, too, made it as much their business to keep the working-man away from the theatre as from the public-house and similar avenues to perdition. The “patent” or privileged theatres, in order to cater for the vapid and frivolous tastes of the public, were compelled to serve up Shakespeare in homœopathic doses—either as *lever de rideau* or farce, piecemeal, disguising the flavour with music, or absurd and grotesque stage settings. Elsewhere, too, all artistic standards were abandoned, and buffoonery was rampant. The manager of one theatre, then constantly playing to full houses, was a wealthy ex-policeman. Macready, who boasted of having restored to Shakespeare’s text its legitimate supremacy, struggled in vain against the new tendencies—both Puritan and profane. Forgotten by the public, reduced by paralysis to impotence and immobility in an arm-chair, he passed his latter days in repeating inwardly, without moving his lips, the words of Lear :—

Who loses and who wins ; who’s in, who’s out . . .

Shakespeare, resuscitated by Garrick a century before at an East End playhouse, was now banished to a

theatre in North London. From 1844 to 1862 that excellent actor Phelps produced at Sadler's Wells Theatre, Islington, no less than thirty-four of Shakespeare's plays, with a total of 3500 performances. But the resources of Sadler's Wells were limited. There was great lack both of scenery and mechanical appliances. For the setting of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in order to retain for the public a certain sense of illusion, Phelps stretched a veil of gauze between the stage and pit.

Meanwhile the years were passing. A certain young actor was scoring one success after another in the provinces. Coming to London, he made a triumphal progress from the St. James's to the Queen's, thence to the Vaudeville, and finally to the Lyceum, where on October 31st, 1874, he made his appearance as Hamlet. His triumph was phenomenal. *Hamlet*, in the character of the latest novelty, had a run of two hundred consecutive nights! It was not the ancient favourite resuming possession of his own, and returning from the obscure theatre at Islington to the greater London stage; it was a poet never before heard, a tragedy never before seen—a glorious, overwhelming revelation! And this miracle was the work of Henry Irving, afterwards Sir Henry, who in less than half a century, from 1874 up to the present time, has rendered Shakespeare of all English dramatists the most applauded, the most modern, and the fullest of vitality.

The lack of a prose drama in England is to a great extent compensated at the present moment by the favour in which the Shakespearian repertory is held. To be present at some of these performances is an

enviable privilege, especially for Italians. Our great tragic actors have been unrivalled in their interpretation of Shakespeare's characters, but they never had, nor was it possible for them to attain, the means of rendering the entire construction and atmosphere of Shakespearian tragedy.

Here in London, I will venture to say, the cases are reversed. Sir Henry Irving, Mr. Beerbohm Tree, Mr. George Alexander, Mr. Forbes Robertson, and Mr. F. R. Benson, who have within the past quarter of a century, but more especially in recent years, compelled the admiration of their fellow-countrymen for at least thirty out of the thirty-seven works of the poet, are actors of varying and—in certain cases—questionable artistic merit; but all have presented, and continue to present, the works of the poet in a superb stage setting, the which—for accuracy, refinement, and brilliance—has never been equalled in any age or in any country.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was, from the point of view of *mise en scène*, the greatest Shakespearian success of late years. Tree turned the stage into a truly enchanted world, with Puck and his companion elves and sprites alive and actually flying through the air, in such fashion that it was impossible for the spectator to see, and difficult even to suspect, the presence of the wires that moved them; with green woods and flowery dells, full of shade and perspective; with exquisitely designed costumes, and striking and appropriate light-effects. In his setting of this fantastic creation—which few would have ventured to imagine apart from its dainty poetic garb—he contrived to maintain all the

hazy character of a dream ; he succeeded in materializing a vision, while, so to speak, preserving all its unreality. I never remember experiencing such gratification of all the senses—the eye delighted by grace of line, form, and colour ; the ear gently lulled by the soothing modulations of Mendelssohn's music ; and the intellect stimulated by the gems of poetry scattered like jewels amidst the grotesque elements of the composition.

But I also remember that this exceptional production brought once more into prominence the question—venerable as pedantry itself—of the Shakespearian *mise en scène*. Is it fitting, is it logical, is it permissible to mount one of Shakespeare's tragedies or comedies with all the resources of the modern stage ? Does it not amount to an alteration, or even profanation, of the very essence of the work, which should reach the intellect untrammelled by any scenic illusions ? Is it not probable that the poet's contemporaries, who saw the *Midsummer Night's Dream* acted without any of these accessories at the house of the Bishop of Lincoln, would fail to recognize it as it appears on the stage of His Majesty's ?

Scholars are the most vehement of those who would bar the modern stage to Shakespeare. According to them, he should only be read ! As an extreme concession, they might allow him to be recited ; but never should he be put upon the stage with all the fripperies required to ensure the success of the latest American or Parisian musical farce ! To interrupt the idyll of Ferdinand and Miranda with thunder and lightning, artificially produced behind the scenes, is to them a

profanation of the *Tempest*. If this be so, scholars have only to stay away from the theatre when Shakespeare is played, as do well-bred girls when a *pochade* holds the boards. But, thank Heaven, Shakespeare did not write only for scholars! He wrote for the public—not that he might be read, but that he might be acted.

It is said that the poet, if he came to life again, would repudiate all the accessories with which his works are mounted on the modern English stage. It is certain, however, that he did not repudiate such contrivances as the stage of his own time afforded him, and if these were primitive, defective, and grotesque, the fault was not his.

The London theatres may be said to have come into existence together with the Elizabethan drama. At the end of the reign of Good Queen Bess, the capital possessed eleven; almost all built within the last few years. They were not constructed after the classic design of Vitruvius, like the Italian theatres, but rather on the model of the courtyard of an inn, from the galleries of which it had been the custom in England to witness the performances, which took place in the yard below. They were built of wood; for the most part destitute of roofs, and therefore only open in the summer. Nearly all were situated on the right bank of the Thames, in a district then uninhabited, and consisting of meadows interspersed with trees. Performances took place in the daytime, from two till five o'clock, and the audience generally arrived by water, in wherries. Like the woollen-draper's shops in Lombard Street, every theatre bore a sign—the *Fortune* a figure of Fortune;

the *Globe* a Hercules supporting the Earth upon his shoulders. The blowing of trumpets and the hoisting of a flag upon the building announced the commencement of the performance. The prices of admission were one penny for the pit, where the spectators stood on one another's toes, and twopence or threepence for the boxes and galleries, to which every spectator who chose might carry his own stool. The stage was only slightly raised above the ground, and was separated from the pit by a balustrade. At the back of the stage two massive pillars supported a balcony, which was sometimes visible, and sometimes covered by a kind of curtain. It served to represent either a stage upon the stage, as in *Hamlet*, or a bedroom, as in *Othello*, or an actual balcony, as in *Romeo and Juliet*. On this balcony was the door by which the actors made their entrances and exits, and behind the door a staircase led to the artists' common dressing-room. On the stage itself seats were occupied, sometimes forcibly, by cavaliers and ladies who, from the vantage-ground of these places of honour, behaved in a manner which would bring a blush to the cheek of the most cantankerous and insolent of modern "gallery boys." The cavaliers criticized the actors aloud, bantered and imitated them, and during the waits ate apples and nuts, played cards, and smoked tobacco. The ladies, their faces jealously concealed by masks, smoked pipes and scattered orange-peel upon the poor devils herded together in the pit.

The exact nature of the *mise en scène* in such theatres has been much debated by the learned. The stage directions given by Shakespeare in his plays

imply the use of walls and banks, from which the characters were to deliver speeches, and the minute descriptions sometimes given of the scene of action would appear ridiculous, unless the objects described were to be represented, in however primitive a form, upon the stage. Besides, we have records of a certain performance in 1592, in which Venus descended from on high, to alight on her throne, by means of a mechanical contrivance, which was probably far from perfect, and must have given rise to considerable speculation among the dwellers on Olympus as to the ultimate fate of the Goddess, but which, all the same, undoubtedly *was* a mechanical contrivance. That canvases were used as scenery, with cities and landscapes painted in perspective, as in France at the beginning of the seventeenth century, is more than probable; and it is an ascertained fact that for the performance of tragedies long black draperies were stretched across the back of the stage, according to the Greek custom. Further than this we know not, and certain admirers and critics of Shakespeare are unwilling that even in these days the production of his plays should be assisted by any but these primitive accessories.

One of these admirers, Mr. William Poel, founded a few years ago the Elizabethan Stage Society, with the object of banishing all scenery and mechanism, and of producing the Shakespearian masterpieces with the same simplicity with which Shakespeare himself and his fellow-artists, the actors Burbage, Alleyn, and Tarlton, must have acted them in the early years of the seventeenth century. Foel set about his task with great enthusiasm, and until a short time back continued

to perform Shakespearian plays in college halls or quadrangles, without scenery or division into acts, and with a faithful reproduction of the stage and all the accessories and theatrical costumes of the Elizabethan period. But his amiable Quixotism was its own reward. His only audiences were recruited from among schoolmasters, schoolmistresses, and their pupils who were preparing for examinations in the text of one or other of the Shakespearian plays, and from University Extension students. There is in this small room for wonder. What was there to justify such an attempt? Is a faithful reproduction of the Elizabethan stage even possible? Not, in my opinion, without falling into inevitable absurdities which would cover the poet's work, in our own eyes, with ridicule.

To begin with, it would be necessary to eliminate the actresses. In Shakespeare's time the female parts were not played by women, to whom the boards were forbidden by law. The characters of Juliet, Miranda, Cordelia, and Desdemona were entrusted either to adult male actors or to the choir-boys of St. Paul's. Mr. Poel, to carry out his project to its logical conclusion, should have tuned his voice to a feminine key and himself essayed the parts of Portia and Cleopatra, in which we have admired Ellen Terry and Eleonora Duse! Besides, if we hanker after scrupulous fidelity to the Elizabethan stage ideal, we must remember also that it aimed at modernizing everything that it presented—considering all the ages as contemporary with Great Eliza. Whence it follows that in these days, to be consistent, Mr. Poel ought to show us Othello in the act of leaving Venice on board the latest type

of steel-clad battleship; while Romeo should fly in his motor-car to keep his pressing appointment with Juliet! And so good-bye to all seriousness and reverence.

The ancients are the ancients, said Molière, and we are the men of to-day. The proper place for antiques is the museum, and there is no need to drag them thence into the light of day. One can understand the attitude of the "bibliomantic school," which would put a veto on all Shakespearian performances; but not that of the Elizabethan Stage Society, which would produce Shakespeare with the resources and according to the standards of three centuries ago. It would be much the same if it were proposed in Italy that Dante should be read, not in the clearly printed and elegant editions of Barbera, but in facsimiles of the obscure and abbreviated manuscripts of the Quattrocento.

The most fitting homage that can be paid to Shakespeare's artistic greatness is to produce his works as they are produced at the Memorial Theatre at Stratford, and in general on the contemporary English stage, employing every resource best adapted to attain the highest possible degree of scenic illusion. The stage is, and always has been, in its nature conventional. What we call artifice is in fact an essential and indispensable element in this conventionality. And Wagner, whose art attained Shakespearian heights, not only made use of it, but considered it an integral part of his work.

I remarked above that the greater frequency in late years of Shakespearian productions compensates to some extent for the lack of a good prose drama in

England. But how is the favour enjoyed by these performances to be reconciled with the vulgar tastes of the average British playgoer?

The fact is that the “great British public” likes Shakespeare, not because it is capable of feeling and appreciating all the beauties of his poetry, but because Shakespeare is a national glory—I might almost say, a national institution; because he is studied by boys at school; because his characters, his episodes, and many of his verses are familiar to every one. For a Londoner to sit through the performance of a Shakespearian tragedy or comedy involves no intellectual effort, produces no new and vexatious disturbance of ideas and sentiments; to him everything is clear, intelligible, and known by heart. Besides, it is the decorative and picturesque elements of the *mise en scène* that attract and delight him; the comic part, which is brought into bold relief by the actors, and perhaps pleases the public more than any other feature of the performance; and finally, the dances.

I have carefully observed the audience at various Shakespearian performances, and I have noted that the features of the play which afford them the greatest interest and amusement are the farcical interludes, the comic characters, the grotesque episodes, and the *tableaux vivants*. In *King John*, Tree causes the curtain to be raised between two scenes, displaying for a few minutes a battlefield with its combatants, both horse and foot, and its dead and wounded. None of the characters either speaks or moves. It is a genuine living picture, such as may be seen at our Italian country fairs; but the audience goes into raptures,

clapping and demanding an encore. The encore is generally conceded ; the curtain rises once more ; those who figured a moment ago as wounded now are dead ; those who were fighting on foot have fallen, and the public testifies to its satisfaction by thunders of applause !

It is not therefore to be supposed that the present-day popularity of Shakespeare is due to any vestige of an artistic sense, or even to literary, critical, or historical interest. This is so evident that the "great British public," which rushes to see and to compare the three or four Hamlets who sometimes simultaneously compete for applause and cash in three or four different London theatres, does not care a rap for all the other performances of the national repertory put together.

These performances are reserved for students and persons of culture, and are, besides, organized by amateurs or by improvised and temporary companies having no commercial aims.

Compared with the great theatrical industry of the West End and the suburbs, they constitute what the French call a *théâtre à côté*. Their performances are given in classical fashion in the open air, in a green setting of meadows, or in University quadrangles or the halls of public schools, or even in minor metropolitan theatres hired for a short season.

The Elizabethan Stage Society produced in this manner, besides plays by Shakespeare, half a dozen or more dramatic works dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Next came the turn of the Mermaid Society, so called from the famous "Mer-

maid" Tavern, which was the rendezvous of all the poets and actors of Elizabethan London, and founded by the youthful Philip Carr, formerly dramatic critic of the *Daily News* and *Speaker*.

These two societies, together with Benson's company and others of minor importance, have revived within a period of a few years the works of the best comedy-writers and dramatists in English literature—from the unknown author of *Everyman* down to Sheridan. Nor is it merely a question of a simple academic experiment. A classic is a classic, not because it is old, nor because (in the petulant words of Stendhal) it pleased our grandfathers, but because it pleases ourselves. Doubtless the pleasure inspired in these days by a "morality play" or a masque of Ben Jonson's, by a religious allegory of the Middle Ages, or a pastoral play of Guarino's, is not always, strictly speaking, a pleasure derived from the stage. But it is a no less lively and genuine one, originating as it does in literary and historical curiosity—the pleasure of contemplating in a critical spirit that which a distant generation enjoyed with simple credulity and sincere conviction. It is this curiosity that is the cause of the present popularity of *Everyman* in England. The most recent performances of this allegory were those by the Elizabethan Stage Society, and those at the Shaftesbury Theatre during Holy Week, 1905.

Everyman is a "morality play," written in 1531 by an anonymous ecclesiastic. *Everyman* (Man in general) is summoned to appear before the judgment-seat of God to render account of his life. He appears there deserted by all his companions—Joy, Strength, Plea-

sure, Beauty, and the Five Senses. Action alone remains faithful to him, and presents him to Confession, who absolves him. This is the drama of Faith. Its deep and sincere tone, its simplicity, its inspired verse, its primitive images convey a tranquil spirit of human mysticism as sweet, penetrating, and melancholy as that which one sometimes still experiences amid the dim shadows of some humble church in the heart of rural Italy.

In addition to similar rudimentary forms of English drama, such as the morality play, religious dramas, mysteries, allegories, interludes, and masques, of late years "pageants" also have been revived. The pageant was a sort of allegorical pantomime, which partakes more especially of the character of a procession, and which usually served to celebrate such events as the return of the Sovereign to London after a war, or from a visit paid to a provincial city. As a spectacle, it corresponded to the French *Mystère mime*. The first pageant of which we have any record was held in 1236, and was intended to celebrate the marriage of Henry III with Eleanor of Provence. But the finest pageants were those organized every year for the election of the Lord Mayor, which were the forerunners of the procession, or "Lord Mayor's Show," which, although denuded of its most picturesque and characteristic elements, survives to this day. Pageants continued to be regular spectacles until the beginning of the eighteenth century, but afterwards fell into disuse on account of the cold and unesthetic severity of the Reformed religion. With all its noble qualities, Puritanism represented the triumph of artistic van-

dalism, and deprived English civic and national life of all the pomp and colour with which it had been embellished during the Elizabethan period, whose characteristics were splendour, gaiety, and brilliance. That period, truly marvellous as it was, and comparable only to the splendours of the Italian Renaissance, and the munificence, elegance, taste, and gaiety of our own princely Courts, became more and more but a dim historical memory ; so that only half a century ago the English seemed to our fathers the simplest and most prosaic of people in their public life, intent only on making machinery and money, with none of that restfulness and solace of the spirit which is only afforded by the manifestations, in some form or other, of the beautiful. The smoke which poured in continuous volumes from her high chimneys appeared to have blotted out for ever the England that once had been.

It is only of late years that there has again awakened that feeling of the Cinquecento for pomps and grand processions, of which we had such a memorable example, first in the Jubilee celebrations of the late Queen Victoria, and afterwards in those arranged for the Coronation of King Edward. It was in fact the great success of these two events that suggested to many minds the idea of resuscitating other spectacular forms belonging to the Elizabethan age, and one of the first revivals to be attempted was that of the "pageant." These have now been given at Sherborne, Warwick, and Bury St. Edmunds. It is thus that the pageant has resumed its place in English life, and has renewed the lost art of the collective dramatic spectacle in which the people is itself the actor.

For this is the very essence of the pageant; that it should be a common function—not only witnessed, but actually performed by the entire community. At Warwick in 1906, as at Sherborne in 1905, nearly every family, from the richest to the poorest, was expected to furnish an actor—man, woman, boy, or girl—to take part in the spectacle. For a pageant which lasted a week, the population of Warwick was busily preparing for a whole year. Two thousand citizens gave their services without remuneration of any kind; most of them even providing for the expense of their own costumes. From the Castle down to the humblest cottage, every one bore a hand. And this co-operation was not confined to individuals, since all the institutions of Warwick—from the schools to the almshouses—contributed to the success of the undertaking. Hence for a week the entire town, without distinction of class, sex, or age, lived as in a dream through a species of Elizabethan phantasmagoria, reviving the deeds, the costumes, and the figures of a distant and glorious Past.

The subject of the Warwick pageant comprised a vast historical cycle, commencing from the legendary origins of the city, and then taking in all the principal episodes of English history, up to 1600, in which the Earls of Warwick were concerned. For the space of a week, around the magnificent Castle was to be seen living pictures, ballets, dances of every description, accompanied by singing, and processions. Especially splendid was the reproduction of the historic visit paid by Elizabeth to the Castle, and also to that of Kenilworth.

The merit of having revived the pageant is entirely due to the noted playwright Mr. Louis N. Parker, who, besides making accurate historical studies on various subjects, has displayed a most refined taste in furnishing ideas for similar spectacles, as well as in organizing and directing them in various places. Pageants cannot be considered as dramatic spectacles ; still, the *théâtre à côté* has given and continues to give us performances of forgotten dramatic works dating from before, during, or after the Shakespearian period. Thus we are indebted to them for a most interesting production of Marlowe's (1564-1593) *Doctor Faustus*, and of his masterpiece, *Edward II*; for the exhumation of the *Sad Shepherd*, the *Silent Woman*, and the *Mask of Cupid* by Ben Jonson (1573-1637); of the *Duchess of Malfi* by Webster (1575-1625); of the *Faithful Shepherdess*, the *Maid's Tragedy*, and the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Beaumont (1584-1616) and Fletcher (1579-1625); of the *Spanish Gipsy* by Middleton (1570-1627) and Rowley (an actor from 1607-1627); and of the *Broken Heart* by Ford (1586-1656). In a quiet corner of the Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park, without stage, scenery, or wings, on a green lawn, with a background of trees and flowers, in a feeble and uncertain light, the Mermaid Society, in 1903, also produced the *Comus* of Milton (1608-1674). No atmosphere could be imagined better adapted to this most poetic masque, interwoven with lyrics and pavans, to which the music of Henry Lawes lends such inexpressible grace.

On the other hand, the exhumation of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* by the Elizabethan Stage Society was less happy.

Many works of the dramatists of the Jacobite period and Restoration, Vanbrugh (1664-1726), Congreve (1670-1729), and away down to Sheridan (1751-1816) were also put upon the stage.

Of Sheridan's work, the Mermaid Society produced *The Critic*, which Byron considered the finest comedy in the English language. But Sheridan neither belongs to the past, nor is he food only for the cultured. He still lives, fresh and amusing, as Carlo Goldoni does with us, and his *Rivals* and *School for Scandal* still draw, even on the "commercial" stage. Neither indeed can Congreve, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ford, or Webster be reckoned, from an artistic point of view, among the dead. The experiment of the Mermaid Society has had the result, among others, of demonstrating to us their still exuberant vitality.

And now for a few remarks on the revivals of Greek and Latin drama on the contemporary stage.

The happy revival of Greek tragedy at the Odéon, in 1844, had its counterpart on the other side of the Channel, when a year later, in 1845, the management of Covent Garden Theatre in London produced in its turn the *Antigone* of Sophocles in English. The performance was repeated a good many times, and the tragedy was then transferred to the Theatre Royal, Dublin, where the celebrated actress Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) scored a veritable triumph in it. Encouraged by so great a success, the manager of the Dublin theatre shortly afterwards staged the *Iphigenia* of Euripides, which was received with equal favour.

None the less, in spite of these encouraging results, the Greek repertory—which has held its own on the

boards of the Odéon and the Comédie Française to this day, with regular performances by such famous and gifted exponents of the art as Mounet-Sully—was speedily abandoned in England, and more than half a century elapsed before it was again drawn upon. Its resumption is due to that cultured and intelligent actor, F. R. Benson.

After long and ardent study, he produced at Stratford, in the spring of 1904, the entire Trilogy of the *Oresteia*. With the exception of an isolated performance at Vienna not long ago, this was the first time for two thousand years that the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoroi*, and the *Eumenides* had appeared on the stage in their proper order and in their integrity. After the brief season at Stratford, Benson carried the Trilogy on tour to all the public schools of England, and, finally, a year later, in 1905, presented it to a London audience upon the boards of the Coronet. The newspapers spoke of the work with admiration, and Æschylus had . . . a *succès d'estime!*

After Æschylus came the turn of Euripides.

It is said that Socrates never missed a performance of the great tragic writer's plays. But Socrates was a sage, and besides, Athens did not offer the alternative of music-halls! Thus it is not surprising if only a scanty audience attended the Lyric in the spring of 1905 to see the *Hippolytus Stephanophoros*, translated by Professor Gilbert Murray and performed under the auspices of the New Century Theatre. Even this scanty audience was composed of people who hardly ever go to the theatre—persons of culture (for whom the London stage has no attractions); spinsters of more or

less authentic erudition, who therefore affected to consult the Greek text every now and then, in order to judge of the correctness of the translation ; youthful students, generally to be met at the British Museum or London Institution ; critics, *literati*, and a few aristocratic patronesses. The *Troades*, also translated by Murray and performed almost simultaneously at the Court Theatre by Mr. Granville Barker, had no better success.

Still, it would be unjust to attribute all the blame to the bad taste of Londoners. As I sat at those classical performances, I conjured up in imagination the Athenian public packed in the fine theatre on the ridge of the Acropolis ; and I understood all the greatness of that poet who was the first to humanize tragedy, and all the admiration of his auditors, members of that new generation which emerged transformed in politics and in religion from the terrible Peloponnesian struggle.

The profound humanity of Euripides and his passionate intensity, clothed in the conventional forms of the dramatic art of his day, must have appeared full of spontaneity and beauty ; but given the conventional forms of modern drama, even these qualities are not sufficiently powerful to overcome the sense of incongruity, of heaviness, and—let us boldly say—of absurdity produced by the spectacle. Who knows whether in another two thousand years Shakespeare and Goldoni may not encounter a similar fate, and be convicted of violating all the canons of dramatic art which our distant descendants may by that time have adopted !

Still, these performances of Benson, the New Century Theatre, and Barker were isolated productions,

given without any idea or possibility of creating a permanent theatre in London for classical drama. The credit of keeping that drama alive in England with a certain degree of continuity belongs almost exclusively to the Universities and the great public schools.

And this credit dates from several centuries back. It would appear that at Cambridge the students have been performing the Greek and Latin comedies ever since 1386. It is certain that the students of both Oxford and Cambridge acted them with great applause in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Queen Elizabeth honoured their performances with her august presence.

There were times when the drama must have inspired a real mania in the English nation, just as sport does at present. Even the lawyers—not satisfied with the comedies which they daily performed in the Law Courts—during the evenings produced the master-pieces of the antique playwrights in the Temple and other Inns of Court, and the Queen attended these performances also.

At Oxford and Cambridge the plays were given in the College Halls, which serve to this day as refectories—handsome, lofty, and spacious buildings, adorned with pictures, with their oriel windows, vaulted roofs, carved and inlaid panelling, and galleries for the musicians; or else in the Chapels, whose Gothic serenity was profaned with impunity by the jokes of Aristophanes and the licentious witticisms of Plautus and Terence. But the spirit of the times excused such profanation, and sacrificed every other consideration to those of beauty and joyousness—to that full and free

indulgence of the senses which constituted the sole ideal of the Elizabethan era.

Subsequently the storm of Puritan fanaticism—cold, gloomy, and austere—swept away in its iconoclastic and chastening fury even these joyous University dramatic spectacles—especially at Cambridge, which University from the earliest stage of the conflict sided with Cromwell against the King. Nor, as far as I know, were they resumed until about a quarter of a century ago.

The year 1881 witnessed the revival of Greek plays in the great centres of English culture. Oxford led the way with the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus in the original text, with Benson—then an undergraduate of the University—in one of the principal parts. Cambridge followed, in 1882, with the *Ajax* of Sophocles. Then, two years later, it was the turn of Aristophanes, of whose works the Cambridge students made a speciality, putting on the stage the *Birds*, the *Frogs*, the *Wasps*, and the *Knights*.

These performances now take place regularly every year, in the spring, with the high approval of *The Times* critic, who is a consummate Greek scholar, and able to adorn his clever criticisms of these University performances with a wealth of quotations in the original text. Thus, while our Italian students, when they indulge in philothespian excursions, exercise their budding histrionic talents on some cheerful farce, in England, on the other hand, the thing is taken seriously. The contrast is easily explained by the difference of temperament, habits, customs, and traditions, and in the manner of life of Italian and English students.

Oxford and Cambridge are not Universities in the modern sense of the word. They are two magnificent and massive mediæval remains, contrasting pleasantly with the shoddy brickwork of which our mushroom civil fabric of industry and labour is constructed. And just as the ivy and clematis have for centuries tenaciously clung to the walls of the monastic college buildings, so all the most ancient and fantastic customs of the mediæval European Universities—of Bologna, Padua, Salerno, Paris, Orleans, and Montpellier—remain tenaciously intertwined with the life, and to some extent with the ideas, of these two ancient sanctuaries of Anglo-Saxon learning.

But it is not only at Oxford and Cambridge that the Athenian drama has blossomed again of late years. At Bradfield the authorities of the celebrated public school have utilized a chalk-pit, in the side of a hill, for the construction of an open-air theatre, on the exact model of that of Dionysius ; and there the pupils act the *Alcestis*, the *Antigone*, and the *Agamemnon* under the clear sky—or as clear a sky as Berkshire can provide ! For Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes are the provincial favourites, while in London Plautus and Terence triumphantly fill the bills.

This they have now done for a matter of three hundred years without interruption, and their interpreters are the pupils of Westminster School. Ben Jonson, when a scholar there, was one of its dramatic stars. Every year, towards Christmas, the School produces a work by one or other of the two Latin playwrights, in the original text. At one time it will be

the *Phormio*, at another the *Trinummus*, the *Andria*, the *Aulularia*, the *Adelphi*, or the *Eunuchus*. What is more interesting than the Roman comedy, in this performance of the youthful *Westmonasterienses*, is the Epilogue, written in Latin. It is invariably a highly diverting politico-social topical satire. Thus, on the more recent occasions, the Epilogues of the "Westminster Play" have expended much wit and humour on the fiscal controversy, on the large and small loaves of the Free Traders and Protectionists respectively—*Vin' magnum an parvum?*—on the scandals at the War Office, nobly Latinized into *Belli Officium*; on the fanaticism of the players of cricket and football, against whom the strictures of Kipling were also directed—*Lanigeri stulti! lutulenti, o fatui!* . . . ; and on the public men of the day—Chamberlain, Balfour, and Rosebery, the latter of whom is made *solum solum sibi findere sulcum!*

And while we are on the subject, let me say a word, in conclusion, on the pantomime, which holds an important place among contemporary London spectacles, and is at bottom—in spite of the meretricious introduction of dialogue—a distant and degenerate descendant of the pantomime of the Romans. Its origin dates back as far as 1723, when John Rich, manager of Covent Garden, produced the first spectacular pantomime on the *Story of Doctor Faust*. It was a great success, and from that time onward the pantomime has retained its hold upon the English stage. In two centuries, or thereabouts, both its development and its vogue have reached an astonishing pitch.

Annually now, on the day after Christmas, when the grand season of opera and comedy commences in Italy, a large number of the theatres in London and the principal cities of England open with gorgeous pantomimes, which usually run for seven or eight weeks. Those who have never witnessed the Drury Lane pantomime, with its lavish *mise en scène* and its two or three hundred actors, have no idea of the extent to which the modern stage can draw upon the resources of mechanics, optics, painting, and the art of the costumier.

The subject of the pantomime—whose principal characters (Dan Leno was during his lifetime perhaps the most celebrated of these) indulge in satirical allusions to the men and matters of the day—is invariably taken from the rhymes and characters of English nursery lore, which is a very masterpiece of graceful, aimless narrative. This class of entertainment in its very nature would seem to be adapted only for children; but as a matter of fact their elders would seem to enjoy it even more than they. Christmas would not be Christmas without plum-pudding and pantomime—both now elevated by the lapse of time to the dignity of British national institutions.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITERARY DRAMA

WHEN—during the commemorations at Ferrara, in March, 1902, of the political martyrs of 1853—the Italian Minister Galimberti referred to the great affection of Algernon Charles Swinburne for Italy, and declaimed some of his verses, he possibly never dreamed that his words would reach the revered poet, and certainly had no conception of the pleasure they would afford him.

This, as far as I know, was one of the few—too few!—popular tributes that Italy has ever paid, outside literary circles, through the mouth of any representative Italian, to the foreign poet who beyond all others has loved, idealized, glorified, and dreamed of our country.

And this tribute, almost entirely incidental though it was, profoundly touched Swinburne. “I need not say,” he wrote in reply to a letter of mine, “how deeply gratified I was by the generous and cordial recognition of my lifelong love of Italy and my constant sympathy with her cause conveyed in the speech of Signor Galimberti as briefly reported in yesterday’s newspapers. I shall be happy to see you here on Friday. . . .”

And I went—as though on pilgrimage. Swinburne has lived for twenty or five-and-twenty years, together with his most intimate friend, the author Theodore Watts-Dunton, in a modest house, “The Pines,” in a suburb of Putney, on the banks of the Thames. He received me with the shy solicitude of a man unaccustomed to conventional courtesies. His study looks out upon a garden, embellished by a statuette from the hand of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The walls of the drawing-room, study, and dining-room are covered with memorials of the glorious pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—pictures, portraits, designs, and sketches, by Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Morris, and Madox Brown. In his study there are also reproductions of some of Turner’s Italian landscapes.

I found the poet in a state of genial disarray. He was simply, and even carelessly attired. He wore slippers, a black cutaway coat, and a low, unstarched collar, from which depended a wisp of tie.

He moved aside a round table, upsetting a pile of papers, in order to make room for me near the fire, and absolutely insisted on relieving me of my overcoat with his own hands.

“Sit down, sit down !”

But in this study movement of any kind is difficult, on account of the piles of books, of exceedingly unstable equilibrium, occupying every available space—both in the middle and corners of the room, to say nothing of the window spaces. He himself took a seat at my side. While he was again expressing to me his satisfaction at the remarks of the Minister Galimberti, and the pleasure he had experienced at

finding himself still remembered in Italy, I contemplated him. Swinburne—whose lineaments are reproduced to perfection in the celebrated portrait by Watts—is short, slender, and fragile in appearance, with narrow, sloping shoulders. His physical frame is a *quantité négligeable*; the man's entire personality is concentrated in his head. A fine forehead, both wide and lofty, on either side of which falls a tuft of wavy, whitish hair tinged with red, an aquiline nose, a prominent chin beneath a sunken mouth, a scanty beard, white at the roots and reddish at the tip, and two large glowing, shining blue eyes—eyes full of youthful vitality. And he was even then sixty-three years of age!

Who would have guessed it! Certainly no one from those eyes, any more than from his copious flow of living, palpitating speech.

"I have loved Italy from boyhood," he began. "When I was at school I used to say to my schoolfellows, 'Oh, why was I not born an Italian!' a sentiment which was utterly incomprehensible to them. It has been a lifelong love."

Then the conversation turned to Mazzini.

"I knew him personally, and often visited him when he was in London, at Fulham. I shall never forget the hours I passed with him. On these occasions I rarely spoke; I listened reverently to him. After having known Mazzini, I began to understand Christ and His Gospel."

He rose, took down from the wall a large framed autograph portrait of Mazzini, and showed it to me. "He gave me that himself, and besides . . . wait a

moment. . . ." He hung the photograph again on the wall, threaded his way through the piles of books, mounted a heap of papers which served him as a stool, took out a small key, and while turning it in the lock of an ancient book-case, turned to me and said : "This is where I keep books that to me are sacred." And he took thence a book of Mazzini's and showed it to me. It contained a dedication in cordial terms. "Do you know, he had it bound for me himself !" And he drew my attention to the beauty of the binding. He told me that he remained in correspondence with Mazzini and with Signora Venturi up to the last Then :—

"Aurelio Saffi, too, has visited me in my study. He sat where you are sitting now. I remember that the grandnephew of Mr. Watts-Dunton was staying with me here. (Do you remember?)"—"Yes, yes !" replied Mr. Watts-Dunton.) "A young rascal who was never still a moment. When I told him that Aurelio Saffi had been a Triumvir, his eyes nearly started out of his head and he became absolutely silent ! He crouched in that corner without moving a finger. How Saffi laughed ! (Do you remember?)"—"Indeed I do !")

I inquired about his travels in Italy.

"I was only there twice ; the last time in '62. I did not get as far as Rome. Mazzini used to say that he would take me there himself to be . . ." (And here Swinburne laughingly went through the motion of crowning his own head with an imaginary laurel wreath.) "I went to Siena ; but San Gemignano impressed me more than Siena. I remember meeting there an old canon, Don Luigi Pecori, who took me for walks in the woods. He was a priest, but also a fer-

vent patriot, and spoke of ‘our Garibaldi,’ professing himself delighted at the reception we had given him in London. When I related this to Mazzini, he immediately made a note of the canon’s name in his pocket-book.”

“And, next to San Gemignano, what impressed you most?”

“The Veneto. I shall never forget Brescia. And to think that the English tourist passes it by! What a curious city! An auction sale of pictures was taking place there; they belonged to the Marchese Averoldi. Two magnificent Moronis and a Carpaccio—a splendid Carpaccio for one hundred and twenty pounds! And I had no money! Stuff for which the National Gallery would have paid millions! (Wouldn’t they, Theodore?)” —“Yes, yes!” said Mr. Watts-Dunton. “Now tell him about Florence.”)

“Oh, Florence!” continued Swinburne. “It was at Florence that I visited Walter Savage Landor, the great English Republican poet, another lover of Italy. He was then ninety years of age, but as full of spirit as a youth. Look here!” (He fetched a volume of Landor’s works, and showed me the portrait on the first page). “Well?”

“A typical John Bull!” was my remark.

“Quite true! But I wish,” added Swinburne, “that John Bull, like Landor, were a champion of every truly noble cause! He was buried at Fiesole. Ah, those environs of Florence! Those Tuscan valleys! It is curious that I found in them points of resemblance to my native county of Northumberland, especially as regards the water scenery.”

Then he spoke to me of his preferences in Italian literature. Swinburne has a weakness for our writers of the Cinquecento, as Mazzini had for those of the Trecento. Thus, once when inaugurating a monument to Macchiavelli at Florence, Mazzini said to him : "They put up a monument to a great man who lived in a mean age, but they don't put one up to Dante, who was the great man of a mighty age."—"A mighty age?" replied Swinburne ; "then Dante must have been a great slanderer!"

And then, one after the other, he fetched, dusted, and showed me several volumes of the Italian classics printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the admiration of all true pre-Raphaelites for "craftsmanship," he drew my attention to the elegance, solidity, and good taste of the bindings. He showed me a Boccaccio, two fine editions of the *Negromante* and the *Suppositi* of Ariosto, and a Bembo picked up for a few pence at Bristol.

"Read this preface of Bembo's to *Lucrezia Borgia* : does it not bring back to you the *Pro Archia* of Cicero? This is an Aretino. It is a strange thing ; there is a description of Venice by Aretino which is almost identical with that given by Shelley. Both the purest and the least pure of poets retained the same impression of the place ! Oh, do you know that book of Giambattista della Porta on the 'Physiognomy of Man?' (And taking it up he began to turn over its pages, showing me the illustrations.) "As you know, Della Porta claimed to have established, from certain physiological affinities, corresponding moral affinities between man and the lower animals. Rossetti believed in it. I think that is

so funny ! Look at this portrait of Pico della Mirandola. What an extraordinary expression ! And the face of Cæsar Borgia here—the face of a born leader of men."

At this point Mr. Watts-Dunton interrupted him with a smile to tell me that Swinburne was writing a tragedy on the subject of Cæsar Borgia.

"Shall I read him a scene from it?" asked Swinburne suddenly of Watts-Dunton, rising.

"Yes, do," replied the latter, smilingly. And the poet went to search among a heap of papers upon the round table, meanwhile remarking to me : "Cæsar Borgia has been in my mind from my youth upward. He has a great fascination for me. A military genius—more so than Napoleon—a great *condottiere*, but a bad lot, if you will excuse the slang. Yes, *mauvais sujet*, as well as genius! His conception of 'Italia una se non libera' was grand."

He continued to talk to me while searching for the manuscript, and I gathered from his remarks that Swinburne had devoted much detailed historical research to this subject. Presently he returned with a few loose sheets of blue paper, and commenced to read me the third scene of the first act, between Pope Alexander and Lucrezia, and afterwards the fourth, between the Pope and Cæsar. As he read on, he warmed to his work. His voice, somewhat harsh and hoarse, became animated ; it rose and fell, now deep, now shrill, now sibilant. His features worked ; his eyes flamed. His whole slender person quivered, and his left hand—now open, now clenched—beat time upon his knee to the full and melodious music of his verse.

When he had finished, I rose. "Must you be

going already?" He looked out of the window. Dusk was beginning to fall. I thanked him, but he insisted that the thanks were due to me! "You have made me talk for two hours of Italy—dear old Italy! Thanks, thanks!"

Returning home by train, along the right bank of the Thames, whence a black forest of masts arose piercing the twilight gloom, I savoured once more the intimate pleasure that this visit had given me. And out from the grey world that the train left behind it as it whistled on its way, far above the high factory chimneys whence a few last streamers of pale yellow smoke were drifting, higher still—beyond the green gilded tower of Westminster and the ponderous dome of St. Paul's, looming through the shades of night—my spirit soared, still palpitating, towards the bright and glowing ideals from which the presence and words of the poet had rent the veil wherein the foggy atmosphere of my London life had shrouded them.

Liberty and beauty inspire the whole of Swinburne's work—classic liberty and pagan beauty. No other living Englishman has more unconventional impulses, or more generous enthusiasms: none palpitate with such powerful emotions or such voluptuous *abandon*. His poetry speaks with many voices, like the sea that Swinburne loves so passionately and sings with such splendour of imagery—like a rushing torrent, it sweeps majestically along, rejoicing in its own resistless force; it dashes against the creeds and laws of man, as though they were frowning rocks, and breaking with the shock rebounds in a thousand iridescent fantasies. And from the sea, which embraces all shores and all

nations alike, it draws its infinite breadth of view and its universal sympathy; whence it comes that of all English poets, both ancient and modern, it is Swinburne for whom we foreigners have most understanding and sympathy.

He is the least English of them all. His temperament has been formed by various exotic influences—Greek lyric and tragic poetry, decadent Latin literature, Hebrew prophets, French mediæval rhymers, and Victor Hugo—but he has always possessed a certain quality that is “un-English.”

And yet the Republican poet of Mazzini and Mentana is descended from a family belonging to the most high-bred, ancient, and distinguished English aristocracy. On his father's side he is the grandson of a baronet, on his mother's side of an earl. The genealogy of the Swinburnes goes back to the days of Edward II, and the family took its rise in Northumberland, on the extreme northern border of England.

Of the life and personality of the poet little is known, and perhaps there is little to know. He was born in London on April 5th, 1837, but passed his youth elsewhere, partly at the ancestral castle of Capheaton in Northumberland, and partly in the Isle of Wight.

He learned Italian from his mother, Lady Jane Henrietta Swinburne, who had been educated in Italy. He afterwards studied at Eton and Oxford, but left the University without taking a degree, because, although a better Greek scholar than his teachers, he failed in his examination. At Oxford he made the acquaintance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris, with whom he struck up a close friendship.

After Oxford, and a short stay on the Continent, Swinburne was unable to resist the fascination of London. For a year he lived with Rossetti and Meredith at Chelsea. Then he removed to the neighbourhood of the British Museum; and, finally, during the past quarter of a century he has been living with Theodore Watts-Dunton—poet, novelist, and critic, formerly editor of the *Athenæum* and a friend of the pre-Raphaelites—in the house at Putney where I had the honour of visiting him.

Absorbed in his studies, his books, and his memories, he shuns society and never sets foot in a club. He only leaves Putney once a year, when he goes with Watts-Dunton to the seaside. He is passionately fond of swimming. He was once nearly drowned on the coast of Normandy, being swept away by a current, and almost miraculously saved by some fishermen. He has himself described the incident in his poem “*Ex Voto*.”

Once upon a time Algernon Charles Swinburne passed in England for a Republican, but, although in a recent preface to the complete edition of his collected works he endeavoured to affirm the consistency of his principles, he is now considered to be in politics a Unionist. And *The Times* was very glad to publish, during the South African war, a sonnet of his, unworthy of his reputation and vulgarly abusive of the Boers and their women. It was an inexcusable political mistake, which he perhaps endeavoured to consign to oblivion by means of another sonnet, contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the morrow of the sanguinary rising at St. Petersburg, and bearing the violent title: “*Czar Louis XVI—Adsit omen!*”

But the opinions and influence of Swinburne upon political matters are irrelevant. With all his political ardour he is the most literary of poets, and one would almost think that he contemplated existence through the medium of literature, in the same way that he sees Italy, even now, through the medium of Dante and the Cinquecentists.

The whole of his dramatic work, too, is purely literary—not theatrical—and he himself proclaims, in the above-mentioned preface to his collected works, that “when he writes plays, it is with a view to their being acted on the stage of the Globe, the Red Bull, or the Black Friars”—the theatres of Shakespeare’s London. In fact, in contrast to those of Tennyson and Browning, no attempt has ever been made to produce any of his works upon the stage. They belong to the literary theatre, for which some of them are, and will remain, admirable models.

At the moment at which I write, the tragedy on the subject of Cæsar Borgia, from which the poet read me two scenes with so much enthusiasm, has not yet been published. But even apart from that work, the reputation of Swinburne as a dramatic writer is already established by works of high artistic merit.

It was in 1860, when he was barely twenty-three, that he published his first two plays, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamond*. Of these *The Queen Mother* may be considered as a prologue to the trilogy which Swinburne then consecrated to the fascinating figure of Mary Stuart. The principal character is Catherine de’ Medici, and the action develops around the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. The other characters are Charles IX,

Henry of Navarre, his wife Margaret of Valois, and the Duke of Guise. It was at the Court of Catherine that Mary Stuart was educated, thus growing up in the vicious atmosphere of a palace which, to quote the words of the poet, "it would be flattery to call a brothel or a slaughter-house." The interest of the play is purely historical, and it deals very effectively with the horrors of the period.

From a literary point of view, its construction and treatment betray the full and direct influence of Shakespeare. *Rosamond*, the other play contained in this first volume, is in one act and five short scenes, and develops the episode (subsequently treated by Tennyson in *Becket*) of the amours of Rosamond with Henry II at Woodstock, and the jealousy of Queen Eleanor.

Between these first attempts and the publication of his masterpiece barely five years elapsed, but the appearance of *Atalanta in Calydon* in 1865 was crowned by a brilliant and immediate triumph. This tragedy, classical both in its subject and in its construction, was saluted in England as the work of a true poet. Forty years later it still preserves all its fascination, and together with the first series of *Poems and Ballads*, represents the noblest and most inspired work that Swinburne has ever done. The same lofty and solemn level is maintained throughout, from the exquisite picture of Spring given by the Chorus, at the beginning of the tragedy, to the dying Meleager's farewell to Atalanta which concludes the last scene. By the intensity of its pathos, the splendour of its imagery, the magnificence of its language, the beauty of its verse, and the perfection of its metre, *Atalanta in Calydon*

ranks as one of the finest tragedies in the world's literature.

It is well known and admired even in Italy, where, if I mistake not, the other dramatic works of Swinburne are almost unknown.

The dramatic poem *Chastelard*, written before *Atlanta*, though not published until later, is the first of the trilogy dedicated to that false Queen "the sweet serpent of France and Scotland," and completed, with intervals, in about sixteen years—*Chastelard*, *Bothwell*, and *Mary Stuart*. In *Chastelard* there appears, perhaps for the first time, the Swinburnian conception of love, as of an unbridled and senseless desire, voluptuously and mentally spasmodic, which neither the possession of the body nor of the spirit can satisfy.

Chastelard is the soldier-poet, lover of Mary Queen of Scots, who cruelly caused him to be beheaded. The character of the seductress is admirably studied and rendered in the tragedy, but more admirable still is the picture of the strange hapless passion of her victim, who loves—and loves desperately—although fully conscious of the ignoble and faithless nature of his mistress.

Why should one woman have all goodly things?
 You have all beauty; let mean women's lips
 Be pitiful and speak truth: they will not be
 Such perfect things as yours. Be not ashamed
 That hands not made like these that snare men's souls
 Should do men good, give alms, relieve men's pain;
 You have the better, being more fair than they.
 They are half foul, being rather good than fair;
 You are quite fair; to be quite fair is best.

The second play of the trilogy is *Bothwell*, published in 1874—an historical drama in five acts, each contain-

ing more than a hundred pages! It is a stupendous work, and reveals a most accurate study of the times and adventures of Mary Stuart, and, among other characters, throws into bold relief the figure of the Scottish reformer, John Knox.

Finally, in 1881, appeared the last part of the trilogy, *Mary Stuart*; but here again the historical element preponderates, at the expense perhaps of the artistic and dramatic interest. The most noteworthy points in the entire trilogy are the unity of vision and of historical interpretation, and the idea of co-ordinating the final catastrophe with a kind of poetical justice. The execution of Mary Stuart is made by Swinburne a direct consequence of the death of Chastelard five-and-twenty years before; and the celebrated letter of accusation, which Mary wrote, but never dispatched, to her rival, is in the tragedy sent by Mary Beaton to Elizabeth in order to avenge the unfortunate soldier-poet.

Before *Mary Stuart*, however, Swinburne had published his second imitation of classical drama—*Erechtheus*. Erechtheus, King of Athens, being threatened with an invasion of the Thracians, the Pythoness gives him to understand that, in order to save the city, Chthonia, his daughter by Praxithea, must die. Chthonia is in fact sacrificed, and the invaders are repulsed. This tragedy, which approaches even more closely than *Atalanta* to the Greek models—especially in the division of the choruses into strophe, anti-strophe, and epode—has however neither the finish nor the originality of the latter work.

Up to this point Swinburne had drawn upon either

classical antiquity or English history for the subjects of his tragedies, but in 1885 he had recourse to the other favourite fountain of all his poetic inspiration—Italy. *Marino Faliero* is perhaps at once the most human and the most thoughtful of his tragedies, and the character of the Doge is compared by some English critics, for depth of psychological insight and for artistic effect, to that of King Lear. Republican Swinburne idealizes Marino Faliero, and attributes to him a genuine intention of restoring to Venice an honester and more democratic government. The first three acts are full of dramatic movement, but the fourth and fifth resolve themselves, so to speak, into a single long monologue by the Doge, interrupted first of all by the chant of the monks while he is waiting for the bell of San Marco to give the signal of revolt; next, by the speeches of the Senate when his plan has failed; and, finally, by the Latin psalmody of the clergy when the hour appointed for the execution draws near.

Locrine, a tragedy in rhyme, published in 1887, is more in the nature of an experiment in metre than anything else; while *The Sisters*, published in 1892, represents another experiment, not this time in form, but in substance. In this play Swinburne has attempted domestic drama (of which D'Annunzio too has given us some specimens which are hardly more happy). We are introduced to two baronets, two young men, and the same number of young ladies—all of the early part of the nineteenth century—who talk clothes and books, and breathe an atmosphere of modern ideas and sentiments. But the experiment was unsuccessful, wherefore we see Swinburne, in 1889,

return to the antique—the natural field of tragedy—with *Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards*. This, however, is one of the least sincere and least convincing of his tragedies. It is marked by an almost entire absence of action. The intrigue by which Rosamund induces Almachildes to kill Alboin is obscure; neither is there, to my mind, a single well-drawn character in the play.

After so cursory, so condensed, and so incidental a review of Swinburne's plays there would be no object in pausing to consider whether his dramatic attains the lofty heights of his lyric poetry. He has no lack of impressiveness and resonance of style, but—in spite of these essential qualities of a dramatic poet—it is, in my opinion, as the author of *Poems and Ballads*, and the most melodious, harmonious, exuberant, and imaginative singer of the Victorian era, that his place in English literature is assured.

Even in his tragedies the lyric element is always the most spontaneous and alive, beginning with *Atalanta in Calydon*, whose finest and most popular pages are those containing the seven really perfect stanzas of the Chorus in praise of Spring.

It is possible that, had it not been for the classical and Shakespearian tradition, Swinburne would never have attempted drama; but as he himself tells us in the preface to his complete works, quoted above, his “strongest ambition was to do something worth doing, and not utterly unworthy of a young countryman of Marlowe, the teacher, of Webster, the pupil, and of Shakespeare, in the line of work which those three poets had left as a possibly unattainable example

for ambitious Englishmen." Marlowe, Webster, and Shakespeare then were the three forces which exercised a powerful fascination upon Swinburne, as upon the other leading representatives of modern English literature; these were the three models which rendered even temperaments unfitted for it susceptible to the seduction of the dramatic form—a seduction against which neither Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, nor any other of the great poets of the nineteenth century was proof.

Although the works of the poets I have just mentioned belong almost exclusively to the literary drama, from time to time the experiment has been made of producing some of them upon the stage. I myself witnessed the performance in London of Tennyson's *Becket* and Browning's *A Soul's Tragedy*, but was only the more firmly convinced thereby that neither of the two poets had a real vocation for stage writing.

Tennyson, also an enthusiastic admirer of the Elizabethan drama, always cherished the idea of trying his powers in this direction, but it was not until he was sixty-eight years of age that he produced *Queen Mary*, the first, in chronological order, of his dramatic works. Although both critics and public received his attempts with marked coldness, he persevered in his efforts, and produced in succession *Harold* (1876), *The Falcon* (1879), *The Cup* (1881), *The Promise of May* (1882), and finally *Becket*, his only successful play.

But even in this last case success was principally due to Irving's superb creation of the part of the great rebel prelate. Irving always retained such a strong predilection for the part that he elected to make his re-

appearance in it before the London public, in the season of 1905, after an absence of three years. *Becket* was originally produced in February, 1893, four months after the death of the poet. Irving had been compelled, on account of the exigencies of the stage, to subject the play to so many cuts, to so much condensation and transposition, that he hardly had the courage to submit the acting version, in such altered guise, to Tennyson, who was already in very precarious health. But the poet approved the whole of the alterations, and reposed implicit confidence in the judgment of the great actor. The progress of his malady, however, was rapid, whilst the rehearsals, on the other hand, were disappointingly protracted. His last days were troubled by the thought that he would not live to witness the performance of his play. On the eve of his death he asked his doctor, "When will the first performance take place?" "In May, Irving tells me." "Ah, they were very unjust to my *Promise of May*, but Irving will do me justice with *Becket*."

And so it was.

All the same, the critics at the time refused to endorse the verdict of the public, and to this day they consider Tennyson's plays, from a stage point of view, of little account. The three historical dramas, on Shakespearian models, *Harold*, *Queen Mary*, and *Becket*, appear to me cold in their presentation both of character and periods, rhetorical in dialogue, and melodramatic in treatment; while *The Falcon*, *The Promise of May*, and *The Cup* are laboured and extremely feeble productions.

What can be imagined more delicately and ex-

quisitely romantic than *The Falcon*? The scene is laid in a cottage in an imaginary Italy ; there is no indication either of time or place. A poor gentleman, Federico, is timidly and hopelessly in love with Monna Giovanna, a rich and beautiful widow. His pride, his delight, and his means of support are all centred in a hawk—his sole property—which he has himself trained to the chase. Monna Giovanna comes one day unexpectedly to visit him, and having no suspicion of the poverty of her host, invites herself, without ceremony, to breakfast. Federico, who has nothing to offer her, orders his favourite bird to be killed and served up to the lady. Now it happens to be this very falcon that she has come to request of him, in order to satisfy the caprice of her little son, who is ill. Federico is thus obliged to confess the sacrifice to which the claims of hospitality and love have urged him—

Perhaps I thought with those of old the nobler
The victim was, the more acceptable
Might be the sacrifice. . . .

And the sacrifice is in truth accepted, and compensated with love !

Less fortunate than Tennyson, Robert Browning found no Irving to organize the triumph of his plays upon the stage. They have only been acted by amateurs, or by second-rate professional actors. The Browning Society in the course of its existence arranged two or three isolated performances. Grein's Independent Theatre a few years ago produced *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, and quite lately the Stage Society disinterred *A Soul's Tragedy*.

The latter, according to William Archer, is the most intelligible, as well as the most dramatic of his works ; but I must confess that I have rarely been so bored as when I attended its performance at the Court Theatre on March 15th, 1904. *A Soul's Tragedy* is in two acts : the first in verse, the second in prose. The scene is laid in Faenza in the sixteenth century. On the rising of the curtain we are shown the interior of the house of a certain Luitolfo, whose return home is being awaited by Eulalia and Chiappino. Eulalia and Luitolfo are betrothed, and Chiappino is their friend. But the latter has been sentenced to banishment, and Luitolfo has repaired to the palace of the Provost, in order to entreat that the sentence may not be carried into immediate effect.

All this we learn incidentally in the course of the dialogue, which is devoted to an analysis by Chiappino of his own character. He is an Intellectual of the most highly cultivated type—a kind of sixteenth-century Superman—and as such he, of course, arrogates to himself the right to deride the mean motives by which the mass of mankind is actuated, and himself to utterly disregard those principles which should constitute the noble and lofty motives of a Superman.

In times past Chiappino loved Eulalia, but she never understood. So the world wags ! The world is made for the fortunate, selfish, self-satisfied, dull-witted beings reared in the sunshine—like Luitolfo, and not for unhappy, refined, thoughtful, intellectual spirits who have sprung up in the cold shade of neglect—like Chiappino. He also has lofty political ideals, but his generous republican spirit is superior to the vulgarity

of the mob. In short, the first act is one long glorification of Chiappino by himself, in elaborate verses and involved sentences. Towards the end, his elegant and affected chatter is interrupted by a tumult without. "Ah," exclaims Chiappino, "here are the guards come to take me, and here is our hero Luitolfo, who has come to tell me that he has been unable to move the Provost, and to counsel me to fly!"

But the entrance of Luitolfo arrests the gibe upon his lips. His friend is covered with blood; the Provost has refused pardon to Chiappino, and Luitolfo has killed him! The Superman, in a burst of generosity, urges the latter to fly; he will proclaim himself as the assassin, and will go forth unflinchingly to death. Luitolfo flies, and Eulalia is struck with sudden admiration for Chiappino's self-sacrifice.

But lo, the tumult swells and surges round the gate! Chiappino advances to yield himself into the hands of his executioners. "I am the slayer!" But, stay, these are no executioners! It is the people flocking to acclaim him as the Liberator of Faenza and the suppressor of tyranny. Eulalia fixes a hesitating gaze upon him, and waits in breathless expectation. But Chiappino accepts the false situation, and appropriates to himself with the greatest coolness all the honours of this ovation.

This would be a fine dramatic situation, but no sooner has it been presented than its effect is spoilt in the second act, in which we again encounter Chiappino, who is about to become Provost of Faenza. Ognibene, a Pontifical legate, and a clever, cunning, insidious corrupter of consciences, has turned the

Superman Chiappino into a common opportunist, who rises to power upon the ruins of all his ideals.

The *Soul's Tragedy* lies in its transformation ; but we neither witness it, nor can we explain it. The process has taken place "off," between the acts, when the curtain was down !

The whole work is, perhaps, a political and moral satire, but it lacks conviction, cohesion, and dramatic force. Its subtle, involved, and interminable psychological analysis renders it obscure, heavy, and tedious. Admirers of Browning, not content with his true greatness as a poet, are anxious to extol him also as a playwright. But the combined forces of the Browning Society, the Independent Theatre, the Stage Society, and of all the most eminent critics will never succeed in galvanizing his dramas into even the semblance of life.

The three greatest poets of the Victorian era all lacked the first and most necessary quality of the playwright. Neither Swinburne the lyric, Tennyson the epic, nor Browning the analytic poet ever possessed the faculty of viewing life from an objective point of view ; not one of them was endowed with what the English call the "stereoscopic imagination," or, in other words, with the faculty of endowing their creations with the semblance of solidity.

On the other hand, Thomas Hardy does possess just such an imagination, and his contribution to the literary drama is one of the most curious and interesting. Hardy is a novelist ; indeed, the best modern English novelist after George Meredith. He is sixty-six years of age. He is small and slight, with lean

and angular features, and small, round, piercing black eyes. He lives in the country, in Dorsetshire, in a cottage which—having in his youth practised the profession of an architect—he built for himself.

It is only of late years that he has attained to celebrity in England, and even then not so much owing to the absolute merit of his art as to the commotion excited, in 1891, by the first appearance of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The offence to their prudery which Puritans detected in this novel, the polemics concerning its realism, the supposed audacity of the subject, quickly ensured for Hardy a popularity that twenty years of literary labour had failed to compass. At the present time, in spite of the Latinity of his style—the most Latin in its character since Dryden and Milton, and a contrast to the fashionable cockneyisms of Kipling—and notwithstanding his meditative and melancholy spirit—a contrast to the confident self-complacency of Merry England—he is widely known and esteemed by persons of culture, and, I venture to believe, also by the general public.

Thomas Hardy is a great pessimist. Pessimism is stamped upon his whole physiognomy of thinker and artist. But this is enough to establish his originality. Modern writers, as a rule, derive their pessimism from impressions, study, and delineation rather of society than of the individual. The abasements of ignorance and misery, the conventions and falsehoods of society, the great passions developed in and by collectivity—such as the thirst for go'd and the love of power—these are the elements which diffuse such a lurid light through the pages of French and Russian pessimistic

novelists. Hardy's novels are quite otherwise. His may be defined as pure pessimism. Its source is not in human society, but in Man himself; not in all the accessories of Life, but in and through Life itself, in its actual physical manifestations.

The scene of all his novels is laid in the country, and their atmosphere is that of primitive nature. His characters are also taken from the most primitive class of society, that of the agricultural labourer. It is true that environment, education, and the conditions of his existence exercise their respective influences upon him, but to a less revolutionary extent than upon individuals belonging to the more sophisticated classes. With these characters, moving amidst the primitive operations of the soil, "far from the madding crowd" which is subject to the influences of the mighty complex modern social organism, Hardy carries us back to the most normal and constant of human types, those living under the least temporary and the most rudimentary conditions.

He is thus able to give to his pessimism clearer, if not more convincing expression; and his living types appear to the eye of the reader more directly and materially under the ban of that gloomy law which persecutes them, and which Hardy indicates as the determining cause of their sufferings. For in this the pessimism of the English novelist is original. Our unhappiness, our miseries, our moral and material failures, our indescribable sufferings, our undeserved afflictions depend neither upon ourselves nor upon the beings or objects around us; nor, in a word, on any of those things which science, or experience, or common

sense would consider responsible. They depend on a sort of destiny which broods, sombre and menacing, over our lives.

It is easier to understand—after reading eight or ten of his novels—than to explain what is the nature of this destiny. Others would call it chance, or circumstance, or accident; but to Hardy everything “fortuitous” conceals in reality a conscious energy acting with premeditation, and is fortuitous only when the faculty of discerning and penetrating the connection is wanting to us. “In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things,” we read in *Tess*, “the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour of loving. Nature does not often say ‘See!’ to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing; or reply ‘Here!’ to a body’s cry of ‘Where?’ till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game.”

It is these “non-Intelligences” which in Hardy’s novels exercise a baleful influence on life, and retard, entangle, or ruin for ever its natural combinations. This is not the place to discuss such a conception. It has, at bottom, a cause which is wholly subjective, and perhaps illusory. It represents the rational explanation of the gloom and chill which the temperament diffuses—or of which it is conscious—around itself.

The temperament itself, that is to say, the artist, is far more interesting.

Hardy sees and portrays admirably the sad and despairing side of things. The dreary haze which shrouds all his stories gathers by degrees into a black

and lowering mass, till the action culminates in scenes which are tragic in their force. In them he reminds us of Dostoevsky. But the dominant note is always love —now a bestial instinct, now a sentiment of the loftiest purity — physical passion or chivalrous tenderness, brutal possession or sublime devotion, or, it may be, merely the fantastic play of pride and vanity. But always, beneath this varied scale of emotions, Hardy makes us feel that there is only one thing real—life's deception.

Even for him love has delicious moments of fascination and oblivion, sweet torments of uncertainty and expectation; but it never culminates in a physical sense of happiness. When it attains fulfilment it is no longer love, but merely good-fellowship.

Other human affections are depicted by Hardy with a profound intuition and an artistic sincerity that are only possible in a great writer. Over his vast canvases, beside the principal characters, there move secondary figures foreshortened or fleeting, each bearing the masterly imprint of a type.

The scene of his novels, about twenty in number, is always the same. It lies in the south-west of England, round about Salisbury Plain. The picture he gives us of these regions is original, and instinct with the truest feeling.

Sometimes, with the touch of a Flemish master, he makes them the subject of the most exquisite *genre* studies. At others, in a broad synthetic style—like the art of Giovanni Segantini—he translates them into complete or finished pictures. No one who has read *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urberv-*

villes will ever forget the pages which, in the first, describe the sheepshearing, and, in the second, the milking of the cows.

Nature does not serve as a mere setting to the scenes that Hardy describes. She herself, owing to the Pagan feeling the artist has for her, plays one of the principal rôles. For him, the seasons have their moods. Morning and evening, night and noonday has each its own peculiar temperament. Winds, plants, streams, clouds, silence, and starry skies have each their characteristic dispositions ; and the whole speaks in a tongue audible to the spirit. A gust of wind among the trees, or along a hedge, on a starlight night, appears to him the sigh of some vast and mournful spirit, near to the universe in point of space, and to history in point of time. He makes the beech-trees, too, look down upon the passers-by with inquisitive eyes.

Salisbury Plain at daybreak is a mighty being awaking from slumber. "The grey half-tones of daybreak are not the grey half-tones of the day's close, though the degree of their shade may be the same. In the twilight of the morning light seems active, darkness passive ; in the twilight of the evening it is the darkness which is active and crescent, and the light which is the drowsy reverse." In these grey half-tones beings are transformed to the eye into new, strange, and visionary essences, and therefore Hardy calls the hours of twilight "non-human hours." The outer world is to Hardy somewhat like the chorus to the Greek dramatist. It reads the thoughts of its inhabitants, listens to their voices, interprets them, and sings the story of their sorrows and their doom.

One of his earliest novels, *The Trumpet-Major*, which appeared about 1884, treated through the medium of a series of humorous episodes a subject of historical interest—the state of mind prevailing in the south of England at the time of the Napoleonic wars, and the loudly heralded and much dreaded invasion of the French army. Now this subject continued even subsequently to exercise an ever increasing fascination on Thomas Hardy. He dwelt in the very district where the story of those stormy times still survived, coloured by the popular imagination, as it does to this day. At no great distance lay the summer residence of George III, where Pitt came and went to keep the monarch informed of the various phases of the great duel with Napoleon. And, lastly, a relative of his, Captain Hardy, had taken a notable part in those very events, had fought at Trafalgar and received the dying Nelson in his arms.

Apart from these local and personal reasons, Hardy felt all the overwhelming grandeur of that “vast international tragedy” in which England had been involved at the beginning of the nineteenth century; but the more he thought of it, the greater appeared the difficulty of compressing this colossal and varied subject within the limits of any form of art. Thus, by a fortunate inspiration—or the reverse—he ended by conceiving a novel and daring departure—a panoramic or spectacular drama, *The Dynasts*, in three parts, nineteen acts, and a hundred and thirty scenes, written partly in verse and partly in prose, and designed for the study, not the stage. In this play, that pessimistic philosophy into which Hardy had already initiated us

in his novels, is applied by certain Abstractions, Intelligences, or Spirits, to historical facts and personages, which are reproduced with truly stereoscopic imagination. First of all, let us give a summary of the First Part.

PROLOGUE

The Overworld. Dialogue between the Ancient Spirit of the Years, the Spirit of the Pities, the Shade of the Earth, the Spirits Sinister and Ironic, Rumours, Spirit-Messengers, Recording Angels, with Choruses of the Years, the Pities, Intelligences, etc. The Shade of the Earth asks what are the designs of the Immanent Will; to which the Spirit of the Years replies that it works unconsciously. "Still thus? Still thus? Ever unconscious!" laments the Chorus of the Pities. The Spirits continue to argue on the irrationality, apparent or real, of the terrestrial tragedy—or comedy, as the Spirit Ironic suggests—until the Recording Angel, reading from his book, informs them of the actual state of affairs; Peace is made captive; Vengeance is unchained; wars and disaster threaten mankind. The Spirit of the Years advises them to follow scene by scene the spectacle of Europe torn by conflict. "The nether sky opens, and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure, the Alps shaping like a backbone, and the branching mountains like ribs, the Peninsular plateau of Spain forming a head. Broad and lengthy lowlands stretch from the north of France across Russia like a grey-green garment hemmed by the Ural Mountains and the glistening Arctic Ocean." The Spirits look on. The Intelli-

gences confess in chorus that the spectacle will afford them food for meditation, but not instruction :—

We may but muse on, never learn.

ACT I

The time is March, 1805. The first short scene is laid in England, near the coast. A stage-coach is passing, also regiments of soldiers. The passengers are exchanging the latest news, and discussing “Boney’s” threatened invasion. Great events have thus their prelude in provincial gossip, and the Spirit Sinister, hovering above, comments to himself: “Begin small, and so lead up to the greater. It is a sound dramatic principle. I always aim to follow it in my pestilences, fires, famines, and other comedies.”

From the English coast the Spirits pass over to Paris, to the office of Decrès, the Minister of Marine, at the moment in which the latter receives Napoleon’s orders to make the final dispositions which are to land the army of invasion on English soil. Then they return to London, where the third scene is laid in the House of Commons. The Spirit of the Pities, that of the Years, the Spirits Ironic and Sinister (“There’s sure to be something in my line toward, where politicians are gathered together!” says the last-named) enter the Strangers’ Gallery, and are present at the solemn sitting of Parliament—“so insular, empiric, unideal”—in which “pale debaters,” among them Sheridan, Pitt, and Fox, discuss the measures of national defence. This is followed by a scene in dumb

show at the port of Boulogne, introducing the French army of invasion engaged in practising the operations of embarking and landing. The fifth scene brings us back again to London, to the house of a "lady of quality," where ministers, lords, and members of Parliament are passing the evening. Here we learn that England has signed a treaty with Russia, and that the Allies engage to liberate Europe, and particularly Italy, from the Napoleonic yoke; but the Spirit of Rumour enters the room in the form and habit of "a personage of fashion," and undeceives the company. They are hoping easily to deliver Italy from Bonaparte!—why, it is said that Bonaparte has already arrived at Milan for the Coronation, whereby he hopes solemnly to establish his power over the peninsula!

And so it is! Napoleon—partly for the purpose of deceiving the English as to his real aims—is at Milan, and in the sixth scene we see him crowned in the Duomo, together with the Empress Josephine, by the Archbishop Caprara. It is a glorious day in the month of May, but the Spirits, still invisible, are present at the ceremony, exchanging reflections somewhat unflattering to the Archbishop, and to the religion which he subordinated to the schemes of the Conqueror. The Spirit of the Pities even approaches Napoleon in the very midst of the function, and whispers in his ear:—

Lieutenant Bonaparte,

Would it not seemlier be to shut thine heart
To these unhealthy splendours?—render thee
To whom thou swarest first, fair Liberty?

ACT II

The first and second scenes of the second act introduce the admirals of the hostile fleets—Nelson and Collingwood at Gibraltar, and Villeneuve at Ferrol. The threatened invasion of British soil engrosses all their thoughts and plans; the latter straining every nerve to bring it to pass, and the former to prevent it.

In the meantime Napoleon is anxiously counting the hours in his hut near the Tour d'Ordre at Boulogne. The whole army is ready, as well as the ships that are to transport it to the other side of the Channel. If the combined French and Spanish squadrons can command the sea for twenty-four hours, the thing is done! Says Napoleon :—

Once on the English soil I hold it firm,
Descend on London, and the while my men
Salute the dome of Paul's I cut the knot
Of all Pitt's coalitions. . . .

On the opposite shore of the Channel the tension is no less. Infantry, cavalry, and artillery patrol the coast, watching for the invader, and prepared to resist him. When night falls groups of watchers are posted on every hill, ready to fire beacons and thus signal the enemy's approach as far as London. On one of these signal-hills, Rainbarrow's Beacon, a few old soldiers, armed with pikes, are mounting guard. In their typical Dorsetshire dialect they discuss Boney and his imminent descent. Let him come! He will meet with a warm reception from His Majesty's soldiers. Last year

one of the speakers had fled at the first alarm. . . . True, but not from fear! . . . Certain stories are enough to make even the most courageous shudder. What stories? You have not heard! “They say that he lives upon human flesh, and has rashers o’ baby every morning for breakfast!” They shudder, and gaze around at the dark dome of the starless sky. In the hut there is something to warm the cockles of the heart. But, lo, a light appears on the extreme western horizon! “He’s come! It is he! Quick with the flint and steel; set light to the beacon!” Next morning, at dawn, long files of carts and carriages, of civilians and countrymen, are seen streaming from the coast towards the interior. Nothing can stop them—not even the assurance that the alarm is false, and that Boney is still on the other side of the Channel!

Act III

He is in truth on the other side of the Channel, enraged at Villeneuve’s frustration of his plan. The French admiral, instead of making sail for the Channel, as he had been ordered, on account of an outbreak of fever on board the *Achille* and the *Algeciras*, together with certain accidents to the Spanish vessels of war and the junction effected by the fleets of Calder and Nelson, has turned south and entered Cadiz. The plan of invasion is, for the moment, impracticable. But Bonaparte has no lack of enemies. He will lead his legions to the Danube, instead of to the Thames. He summons Daru, and gives him orders for Bernadotte,

Marmont, and Masséna, organizing his plan of campaign against Austria. The Boulogne camp is struck, and while his soldiers march off singing the *Chant du Départ*, Napoleon turns a last look toward the country which he has only renounced for the time.

“To England afterwards!”

ACT IV

At his royal residence of Gloucester Lodge, on the sea, George III is receiving Pitt in audience. The Prime Minister, burdened with the growing responsibilities of power, asks for permission to conclude an alliance with Fox and Lord Grenville. But the narrow-minded King refuses. “Rather than Fox, why give me civil war!” George’s tranquillity is undisturbed, and he has full confidence in the diplomatic ability of Pitt to unmask the designs of the “bombardier of dynasties that rule by right Divine.” Has not the plan of the Corsican to invade England perhaps already come to naught, thanks to the coalition skilfully engineered by Pitt? And in truth at this moment the Corsican is far from the Channel, and we see him next under the walls of Ulm, ready to deliver an assault upon the city. The Austrian General Mack, who had been charged to defend the place as long as possible, in order to bar the road from the Black Forest to Bohemia against Napoleon, and give time for the Russians to come up, is defeated and compelled to capitulate. When, together with his officers, he lays his sword at the feet of Napoleon, the latter deplores the necessity of making war upon the Continental Powers, which

have been stirred up against him by British machinations :—

. . . I want nothing on this Continent :
The English only are my enemies.
Ships, colonies, and commerce I desire,
Yea, therewith to advantage you as me.

The news of the disaster at Ulm is carried to London by a Dutch newspaper. Pitt is overwhelmed. The blow he had hoped to deal Napoleon by means of the Allies has failed. England's last hope is Nelson.

“Nelson to our defence !”

ACT V

The fifth act is the only one in the whole play that is really dramatic—full of contrasts and of strong passions. We are transported to the open sea off Cape Trafalgar, and are present at the great battle. The scene alternates between the deck of the *Bucentaure* and that of the *Victory*, and we follow the thoughts and feelings of Villeneuve and Nelson respectively during the fateful day. All that concerns Nelson—his contempt for danger, which even forbids his removing the medals and decorations which make him a target for the enemy's marksmen ; his wound ; his continued interest in the progress of the battle during two hours and fifty minutes of agony ; his indifference to physical suffering ; his kindly solicitude for the dead and wounded officers and sailors, and even for the French soldier who had wounded him, and who, picked off by one of the *Victory*'s midshipmen, “fell, like an old rook, smack from his

perch, stone dead"; his tender and melancholy thought of his wife and daughter; his farewell to Captain Hardy; his death—all this, I repeat, is described with scrupulous fidelity and admirable artistic effect. The last scenes of this act are the echo of the great victory; they describe to us on the one side the enthusiasm of London and the banquet at Guildhall, and on the other a room in an obscure hostelry at Rennes, where Villeneuve, released from captivity, but in disgrace with Napoleon and loaded with contumely, takes his own life, comforted solely by the reflection that there is no heir to his tarnished name. "Quel bonheur que je n'ai aucun enfant pour recueillir mon horrible héritage et qui soit chargé du poids de mon nom!"

ACT VI

The last act is devoted to the battle of Austerlitz. Napoleon is in his tent dictating his proclamation to his soldiers on the eve of the battle, for which he has hardly completed the final dispositions. Although the enemy before him is Austrian and Russian, he feels all round him England's "hostile breath." As he says to one of his marshals—

'Tis all a duel betwixt this Pitt and me.

It is those "water-rats," the English, who have set in motion the Austro-Russian Allies, mercenaries in the pay of Pitt! But now he is about to gain a victory so splendid that it will efface the shame of Trafalgar; then he will once more direct all his energies against England, protected by her "watery walls," but vulnerable in her

commerce, to which Napoleon intends to close every port in Europe.

. . . 'Tis not long they'll have their way.
Ships can be wrecked by land !

The battle of Austerlitz is fought and won. The Emperor of Austria seeks an interview with Napoleon in order to request an armistice, with a view to peace, and the two ambitious potentates come to an agreement, remodelling the map of Europe in their own interest. ("Each for himself, his family, his heirs ; for the wan, weltering nations who concerns, who cares?" is the comment of the Chorus of the Pities.) In the meantime, the news of the great victory has spread in all directions, and the last scenes show us Paris triumphant, and London plunged once more into consternation. "My country ! How I leave my country !" exclaims the dying Pitt. His spirit has fled, but it will have no peace until the great drama is over !

Such are, briefly, the contents of the First Part of *The Dynasts*. The Second Part has also appeared, but without exciting any special interest among the critics. Will the remainder fare any better? I much doubt it. Noble and lofty as was the poet's original idea, we must none the less recognize that its execution has almost entirely failed. I hasten to add—not in respect of its form. When *The Dynasts* was published, a controversy arose between the author and the critic of *The Times*, in which William Archer also took part. The critic maintained that plays written simply for "mental performance," and absolutely unadapted for production on the stage, constitute a contradiction

in themselves, and fail to justify their existence. Hardy, on his side, denied that his "spectacular poem," although not intended for the stage, was by any means false in conception, or had not its full artistic justification. Mere polemics, the reader will note, concerning the question of form, and in themselves absolutely idle.

The literary drama has its own tradition and its own *raison d'être*. It is impossible to deny to the artist the liberty of giving dramatic form to any of his conceptions, even though he create in the full consciousness that he is writing not for the stage but for the study. Had the axiom been accepted that a play should only be conceived and composed with a view to production on the stage, Goethe would never have given us the second part of *Faust*, nor Byron *Cain*; while we might still possess Manzoni's tragedies, but certainly not the choruses, which are the best part of them.

No! the real question is whether a drama, tragedy, or dramatic poem, designed with a definite literary object, attains this object, or not; that is to say, whether it possesses, apart from its adaptability for the stage, real literary and artistic value. If so, not only is it fully entitled to the admiration and enjoyment attending on its "mental performance," but frequently, when properly adapted for the stage, ends by inspiring admiration and furnishing enjoyment through its "stage performance" also. Thus *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, although originally intended by Ibsen only to be read, have been played throughout Scandinavia and Germany; and the dramas of De Musset were produced for the first time by an enterprising actress in

Russia, many years after they had established their literary fame in France, where no one had ever dreamed of one day seeing them acted.

Let us then consider whether *The Dynasts* attains its literary purpose—whether it contains any genuine artistic suggestion. To my mind, the controversy should be kept within these limits. I will even go farther, and say that if Hardy's work had been able triumphantly to stand these tests, there would have been no controversy at all! The trouble is that it fails to stand them. *The Dynasts* presents to us an historical panorama: pictures of battles by land and sea, sittings of Parliament, conferences of ministers and marshals, military and religious ceremonies pass before our eyes as in a magic-lantern. History is scrupulously respected; but Hardy is not an historian but a poet, and we are entitled to expect something more from him than mere fidelity of description. Has he breathed the breath of life into the figures of his huge panorama? Has he endowed them with soul, substance, psychological truth, and dramatic interest? I think not, and in this opinion I am in perfect agreement with the critic of *The Times*. In reading this first part of *The Dynasts*, I received an impression analogous to that produced upon me by the *ombres chinoises* of Caran d'Ache at the Chat Noir on the subject of the Napoleonic legend; or, better still, by that reproduction of the Chat Noir which many of my readers doubtless visited in the precincts of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. There, with the room plunged in darkness, a fair and intellectual Parisienne explained and commented on the passage of the

shadows, with a catch in her voice whenever it came to the turn of "l'Empereur!"

In *The Dynasts*, this running commentary is entrusted to the Spirits, Angels, and Intelligences, who exchange remarks throughout the progress of the play. Only, instead of imparting philosophical or historical information directly relating to its different characters and episodes, they do nothing but repeat and paraphrase the metaphysical *motif* set forth in the Prologue, as in all Hardy's novels and poems, which is at bottom merely an echo of St. Paul's "predestination," or of modern determinism. But is it possible to imagine any means more calculated to destroy the interest, or even the very essence of the play?

The Spirit of the Years makes it his business to inform us, as each of the characters defiles before our eyes, that he is not what he seems, that his will is an illusion, that his actions do not depend on himself, that he performs them unconscious of the sway of a blind and immanent will; consequently, his vicissitudes no longer interest or affect us any more than those of a marionette, whose actions we know to be controlled by the showman's strings.

It seems inconceivable that a strong and genuine artist like Hardy should not have perceived this, and therefore the only possible explanation is that he intended—and failed—to interest his readers, not in the trivial strife of his characters, but in that vast conflict of the nations, or perhaps even in that symbolical struggle with Fate, in which the whole of Europe engaged at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In contrast to the Napoleonic plays of Thomas

Hardy, destined only for "mental performance—those of Stephen Phillips—although they too belong to the literary drama—were and are written for "stage performance."

Paolo and Francesca, *Herod*, *Ulysses*, *The Sin of David*, and *Nero* have each their own defects ; but they are undoubtedly adapted for the theatre, and also reveal a sound knowledge of stagecraft. Nor need this excite surprise when we remember that the author for six years himself practised the actor's art.

Stephen Phillips is in the prime of his artistic career. He is little more than forty years of age ; his father was a canon of Peterborough Cathedral, and his mother belonged to an old Lancashire family. His first school was at Stratford-on-Avon, where the memories of Shakespeare must have left a strong impression upon his youthful mind. From Stratford he passed to Peterborough School, and there prepared to enter the Civil Service. But the stage attracted him. His cousin Frank Benson was touring the provinces with a classical repertory, and Phillips joined his company. For six years he played with success the parts of Iago, Prospero, and more particularly the Ghost in *Hamlet*. The latter even remained his favourite part, and quite recently, in the season of 1905, when Martin Harvey produced *Hamlet* at the Lyric, Phillips, who had long retired from the stage, was persuaded to make his spectral reappearance therein.

Enviable and pampered ghost !

Phillips is the living contradiction of the old Latin adage : *carmina non dant panem!* A small volume of poems, to which was awarded in 1898 the first prize of

the *Academy* review, has brought him in, up to the present time, a thousand a year! To say nothing of fame! *Marpessa*, a short romantic poem, passed through ten editions in England and America, and has become most popular.

In this world there is nothing more capricious than literary success. Phillips is certainly a poet—harmonious, sonorous, graceful, and, like Keats, a lover of well-turned phrases—but his great popularity is none the less inexplicable. However, there it was, and an actor-manager was found sufficiently astute to profit by it!

In 1899 Mr. George Alexander commissioned Phillips to write *Paolo and Francesca*; hence the former—although he delayed for a considerable time to stage the work when completed—has always assumed the credit of discovering and encouraging Phillips as a dramatist.

His first tragedy (splendidly put on by Tree at His Majesty's) was *Herod*, written immediately after *Paolo and Francesca*. Herod is, without a doubt, one of the most dramatic figures of antiquity. A cruel and unscrupulous conqueror, and yet at the same time a scholar and a dreamer, his character would almost seem to have presented a combination of Oriental ferocity and Western refinement. His life, too, is one long contrast between public success and private misery, between the honours and fortune of the prince and the sorrows and hates of the man. This contrast strikes the keynote of Phillips's tragedy.

Herod has wedded Mariamne, the last of the Maccabees. Of an ardent and passionate nature, he loves

the Queen with such an absorbing affection that for a time he extends his protection also to her brother Aristobulus, although the latter, in his quality of High Priest, adored by the people, is a standing menace to the throne.

However, towards the end of the first act Herod is persuaded to sacrifice his brother-in-law and orders his execution, little suspecting that by such an order he has also killed all love for himself in the heart of Mariamne. Hence when he returns triumphant from his conference with Octavian, he finds that his Queen hates him. Her enemies profit by this change of feeling to make him believe in the unfaithfulness of his wife, and succeed in wringing from him a warrant for her death. But hardly has Herod issued the fatal decree when he repents, and orders it to be suspended. Too late ! In the third act he is living under the illusion that Mariamne is still alive. For a while his courtiers succeed in distracting his attention by dis coursing to him of public matters—affairs of State, monumental works, and the construction of temples undertaken by his orders—but at last, when Herod orders the Queen to be summoned to his presence, they are compelled to bring before him her embalmed corpse. Herod stoops to kiss her, and it is only at the contact of the cold lips that he realizes that Mariamne is dead. He is thunderstruck ! The crowning tragedy of his private life has blasted it at the very moment that an envoy enters to announce to him that Rome has conferred upon him the kingdom of Arabia !

Herod met with flattering success during the autumn

of 1900, and two years later Tree produced, also at His Majesty's, *Ulysses*; while Alexander, almost simultaneously, brought out *Paolo and Francesca* at the St. James's. Both works served to confirm the reputation Phillips had already established as a dramatic author; although *Ulysses* is not so much a play as a panorama of striking scenes—on Olympus among the Gods, in Ithaca among the Suitors of Penelope, in Ogygia amidst the seductions of Calypso, and in the Infernal Regions—with an accompaniment of poetry and music.

Far happier, on the other hand—perhaps the happiest of Phillips's works—is *Paolo and Francesca*. Notwithstanding the useless and arbitrary introduction of the character of Lucretia (if any respect be due to a story which is almost legendary), and notwithstanding certain irrelevant episodes which detract from the central and purely psychological interest, there are in *Paolo and Francesca* superb dramatic situations and not a few gems of poetic beauty.

Phillips's tragedy, *The Sin of David*, is modern in character, and has not as yet been seen on the stage. It depicts a romantic episode to which Cromwell's soldiers lend a Puritan atmosphere; but neither is the episode itself particularly novel or effective, nor is its setting either studied or rendered with originality or artistic conviction.

His latest tragedy is *Nero*, produced by Tree at His Majesty's in 1906. In this play Nero is presented in the conventional character, with all its ferocity and madness, with which our school primers of Roman history made us familiar. The tragedy is not devoid

of poetic charm, but it is cold and spectacular. The figure of the Emperor as presented in the *Nero* of our own Cossa is far more living, more convincing, and more human.

The critics gave a very favourable reception to Phillips's early works. *The Times* critic once remarked of him that he has all the qualities that make for success, and that centuries may elapse before another English dramatist arises in whom the poet and the actor are combined as they are in Phillips. It is to be hoped that this anticipation is not doomed to disappointment; but although, in contradistinction to Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne, his treatment of his characters is genuinely dramatic—not lyric—it seems to me that this treatment is still overloaded with romantic and decorative elements. Possibly time and experience may correct these faults.

CHAPTER VII

THE CRITICS AND THE PLAYERS

THE hall-mark of the English Press and its most legitimate pride is its high tone; and this loftiness of tone is especially characteristic of its criticism. The work of English critics in art, literature, or the drama may be occasionally mistaken, feeble, or superficial, but never vulgar. Alike in *The Times* and in the latest halfpenny paper a lofty and dignified tone invariably marks the expression of journalistic critical opinion. This loftiness of tone affords legitimate cause for British pride.

In Italy, as on the Continent in general, the most fantastic ideas prevail on the subject of English journalism. For the foreigner its pre-eminence consists in the abundance of its news, the freshness of its intelligence, the variety of its articles. On the contrary, its real pre-eminence consists in the form in which news, intelligence, and articles are presented. This is the whole secret of its success, of its prestige, of its influence.

A telegram from Tokio to the *Daily Telegraph*, a financial summary in the *Standard*, a dramatic criticism in *The Times*, all have one virtue in common—correctness. Correctness of form and correctness of spirit; a praiseworthy attribute, at once pleasing and edifying.

For instance, after a "first night" your critic makes a hasty exit from His Majesty's, takes a cab, and dashes off to Fleet Street with twenty or thirty pages of his notebook filled with "copy," which there is barely time to print, revise, and correct. And yet, a few hours later, this hastily executed work will appear in the paper absolutely without blemish—not the slightest printer's error, not one slip in punctuation, not one mistake in names or quotations, not one misplaced heading! *Æsthetically* the article is presented in an attractive form and invites perusal. Whether it be found interesting or tedious, accurate or otherwise, clever or the reverse is another matter; but it will always be as courteous, as polished, as urbane in expression as it is irreproachable in form.

It should be added that the lofty tone of English criticism is by no means due to temperament. It is the result of education, and was attained only by the gradual and judicious elevation of the standard of journalism. Only a century, even half a century ago, the licence of criticism knew no bounds. No latter-day critic would dare to reproduce the violent epithets hurled at the unlucky Keats, whose death was attributed to the attacks of the *Quarterly*. No writer would now stoop to the level of savage animosity with which Macaulay wrote of Crocker, or Ruskin of Whistler.

Libel actions, too, brought by authors, actors, or managers, which were at one time the order of the day, are now extremely rare. On the contrary—according to George Meredith—the criticism of these days is far too politely tolerant. But this politeness, this tolerance are characteristic rather of its form than of its substance.

It too can wound, and with a subtle and delicate weapon which stabs and leaves no open trace—with the keen point of humour. Such pin-pricks are sometimes harder to bear than a crack on the skull.

Take the case of Sardou. When his *Dante* was produced in London, a section of the Italian press loaded him with abuse. English journalists, on the other hand, with a cruel but happy irony, took him seriously. And Sardou was so annoyed as to lose his temper. "The English," he wrote in a Parisian paper, "speak thus out of envy; being themselves incapable of constructing either a comedy or a serious play." Alas, this lesson too was taken seriously! A few nights later, Pinero was present at a public dinner, in the course of which he rose and begged permission to retire, explaining with all humility to the astonished company that he had to go to school at Drury Lane, where *Dante* at that time held the boards!

Nevertheless, of all English criticism, that dealing with the drama is the least polished. It partakes rather of the nature of journalism than of literature. Not that critics are recruited in England, as is often the case in Italy, from the ranks of reporters, amateurs, or University failures. On the contrary, as a rule they are persons of culture and erudition, poets, or authors of note. They are also good fellows; "poor, but honest," as Archer said one evening, in proposing a toast at the O. P. Club. But even they cannot work miracles. One cannot expect to find, in an article written in an hour, the finish of style that used to characterize the *feuilletons* of Janin, Weiss, or Lemaitre, and now distinguishes those of Faguet.

French critics have the advantage of dress rehearsals ; but to these functions the London theatres admit no living soul.¹ It is true that their performances are always over by eleven o'clock ; but taking into account the distances to be covered in London, the English critic's task cannot be completed much before that of his brethren in Milan or Rome. Yet, in spite of the enforced rapidity of their composition, English dramatic criticisms, as I have remarked, invariably display a pleasing and commendable correctness of tone. Although they show a lack of general ideas, the opinions they advance are equable, moderate, and logical. It is true that in dealing with the plot they are wanting in liveliness, versatility, and the art of suggestion ; but on the other hand, their judgments are clear, concise, and to the point. Possibly they lay undue stress upon the interpretation, *mise en scène*, and incidents of the performance ; but this is a concession made, perforce, to the requirements of their readers.

Theatre notices, like leading articles and all the regular features of an English newspaper, are anonymous. This anonymity has its advantages and disadvantages. What is gained in authority and responsibility, is lost in the note of personality, of freedom from constraint. Nor is the gain always in proportion to the loss. It is true that the name of a newspaper has greater influence with the public than that of a critic. When an opinion is quoted as that of *The Times*, it naturally carries more weight than if it were announced

¹ A change in this direction is being brought about lately ; notably at the St. James's Theatre by G. Alexander.

as the verdict of Mr. Walkley. But is it a fact that newspapers exercise any real influence upon public opinion?

This is a complex and debatable question. Judging from personal experience, I should say that the English Press undoubtedly does exercise such an influence very strongly—whenever it acts as the interpreter of current popular ideas and sentiments. But once popular opinion has taken a definite direction, the Press is powerless either to arrest or to change its course. In politics this is perhaps a good sign. It seems to show that the public uses its own brains. Take the case of the recent fiscal campaign. Chamberlain had on his side almost the whole metropolitan press. Old-established newspapers of weight and influence were bought up and harnessed to the Protectionist chariot. But in spite of all, the country as a whole remained absolutely unmoved.

In matters of art, literature, and the drama, this impotence is even more marked, and up to a certain point more easily explained. In politics people may reason well or reason ill, but they are at least under the illusion that they understand their subject. Not so in art. Either the taste exists, or—it does not. If it be present, then criticism may act as its guide, support, and complement; if not, then is criticism absolutely impotent. The “great British public” has no taste, and therefore ignores the very existence of criticism.

Who is the novelist most in vogue in England at the present time?

Miss Marie Corelli! Editions of her novels run into hundreds of thousands of copies, and yet are

quickly sold out. Well, the critics never spared Miss Marie Corelli! In fact, that lady was so piqued at their treatment as to forbid her publishers to send any further copies of her novels to the newspapers for review. So the newspapers either never mention these productions, or only do so in order to make merry over them. And yet every fresh novel means a fresh conquest of the circulating libraries, and one more triumph for the author; who has therefore some excuse for posing in the character of genius unappreciated.

The same may be said of the stage. For years English dramatic criticism has been one long chorus of protest and condemnation. The press teems with daily jeremiads on the "Decline of the Drama" and the "Triteness and Trivialities of the Drama." It wonders why people continue to patronize the theatre! what pleasure they can possibly take in it, what instruction they can derive from it! And how much of all this reaches the ear of the "great British public"? From a commercial point of view, the theatres have never been so prosperous. Critics and public are hopelessly at variance. The former "slate" a piece, and the latter forthwith throng to witness it during continuous runs of months, or even years! Besides, this diversity of opinion between dramatic critic and public is inevitable. It may be observed in all countries, and Walkley's explanation of the phenomenon appears to me extremely plausible.


"The plain truth is," once wrote the eminent critic, "that the playgoer who is merely seeking his pleasure and the playgoer who has to appraise and justify his pleasure almost of necessity take different views. For

the one there is the sole question, Am I pleased? For the other there is that question too, but coupled with another question—this was one of Matthew Arnold's many borrowings from Sainte-Beuve—Am I right to be pleased? Stendhal's precept, 'Interroge-toi quand tu ris,' is nothing to the public, but it is everything to the critic. Or the public may say, 'We were bored,' and forget it as quickly as they can. The critics have to say why they were bored, and that is a bore, so that they are sure to be less charitable to a bad play than the public. The wound rankles. Then it has to be remembered that good plays often make bad 'copy.' A play that presents no variation of type may be interesting enough in itself, but vexes the critic, to whom it offers no 'purchase.' And there are certain classes of play, e.g. melodramas and farces, which always come out worse on paper than on the boards. The critic is generally tempted to describe a melodrama by the ironic method—which is unfair—and to narrate the plot of a farce is to serve up another man's champagne as flat as ditch-water. The public, beyond all cavil, was thrilled by *Sherlock Holmes*, and overlooked the absurdities; the thrill could not be conveyed to the reader of a 'notice,' whereas the absurdities could. *The New Clown* was an amusing farce, and the critics reported it as amusing; but there was no amusement to be got out of their report. It is for a kindred reason that the 'drama of ideas' is apt to be overpraised in print—which is a good medium for ideas. In brief, criticism, being a form of literature, can do justice to the literary elements in drama; but in drama there are many other elements, and criticism is often at fault

with these, because of the difficulty of transposing the effects of one art into the effects of another. Criticism can give the reader a very fair idea of *Hamlet* or *Paolo and Francesca*, of *A Doll's House* or *Le Demi-Monde*. It can only give an inadequate account of the pleasure afforded by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *La Locandiera* or *L'Enfant Prodigue*. With *Les Trente Millions de Gladiator* or *Box and Cox* or *Charley's Aunt* it can do nothing."

All these limitations are inherent in the very nature of dramatic criticism, and it is necessary to take them into account when we consider that criticism in relation to its subject and to the verdict of the public. Which, let us observe *en passant*, is the least desirable light in which to consider it? It is of little consequence whether a dramatic criticism minutely and faithfully describes the substance of a play, or whether it is or is not in agreement with public opinion. On the other hand, it is of the very highest importance that it should possess intrinsic artistic and personal merit—that it should compel our attention, arouse our interest, please and stimulate our intelligence, and touch the chord of our feelings by its personal and characteristic qualities.

There is more than one kind of dramatic criticism. For instance, there is a criticism which concerns itself chiefly with the mode of interpretation, which derives its ideas from the actual performance, which can see and feel the artistic effort that lies behind the actor's play of feature and inflections of voice, and to which the Drama means simply Duse, Ellen Terry, Novelli, or Irving. There is also technical criticism, knowing

all the tricks and artifices of the boards, and taking as its province the construction of the comedy or drama, its stage effects and inventions. But neither of these is true criticism. Each concentrates its attention upon the illusions of the stage, and falls short of the real substance of the drama, which, as in poetry and in fiction, rests on one sole foundation—the human interest.

In short, the only true, the only efficient, the only interesting dramatic criticism is that which in analysing the stage action at the same time analyses the human action of the piece, and in describing the situations invented by the author and the passions that agitate his characters, appeals to the experiences and passions of the spectators and readers themselves. In other words, author, actor, and actresses must all make way for the human interest. In dramatic criticism, as in every other form of art, it is the reflection of ourselves that we most desire to behold. It is when he succeeds in gratifying this desire—and only then—that the critic can claim to have mastered the secret of interesting, of persuading, of moving us, and of making us think.

It is true that this is no easy task. *Critici nascuntur*; and in addition to inborn qualities of sympathy, originality, æsthetic and moral perception, they must have acquired a broad and general conception of Life; they must be endowed with a correct perspective of men and of things. Both their critical analysis and their verdict should always reflect this their characteristic individuality. “Pour mon compte,” wrote Faguet lately, analysing his own literary conscience, “je

suis persuadé que ce que le public me demande c'est avant tout d'être moi-même. . . ."¹

Of such born critics, endowed with a personality of their own, and capable of being "themselves," there is no superfluity even in England. I have already mentioned Grein, in speaking of the "Independent Theatre." I will here confine myself to a notice of two other eminent critics, whose names have already occurred several times in these pages—William Archer and Arthur Bingham Walkley.

Archer has written, and still writes, dramatic criticisms for many newspapers and reviews, and his stage studies fill several volumes. For some years past he has contributed an article every Saturday to the *Morning Leader*, which forms one of the most attractive features of that youthful and lively Radical paper. By nationality he is a Scot, and although little past his fiftieth year, he has stood for more than a quarter of a century at the head of English dramatic critics. He is not a familiar figure behind the scenes; neither does he frequent the society of actors and authors. He is a man of the widest and most genuine culture. He has made voluminous studies in English dramatic literature, as well as in that of other countries—both ancient and modern. He is acquainted with the French, German, Norwegian, and Italian languages; he writes with admirable simplicity, clearness, and precision. His style, nurtured on original ideas, is easy, natural, flowing, and relieved by a vein of spontaneous and genial humour. Above all, it is instinct with vigorous intention and with earnest conviction.

¹ *Propos de Théâtre*—Deuxième Série.

The latter quality is Archer's most prominent characteristic. In his eyes the mission of the critic is one of national importance. "We must realize," he says, "that the Theatre, quite as much as the Cathedral, the University, or the Parliament House, and more, perhaps, than the Stock Exchange, or the Betting Ring, is an inevitable, indispensable part of the national organism, and that while it remains warped, stunted, or atrophied, England is, in so far, not only less beautiful to the æsthetic sense, but less efficient, morally and intellectually, than it is our duty to make her."

He has never believed that the reason of this decadence was to be sought in the public and its aberrations of taste; hence he has always devoted his efforts and counsels to the dramatists, not to their audiences. He considers that noteworthy progress has been made during the past decade, but that this is not enough; that the English stage still lags far behind those of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. It is organic reforms that are required to bring English dramatists up to the level of their fellow-scribes upon the Continent. They require neither a National nor a Municipal nor even a Repertory Theatre. All that is necessary is that they should seek in themselves and in their environment the true elements of artistic success.

The following are the grounds of his opinion. He says in effect: "We have in England several dramatists who, in point of technique, have no reason to envy their French fellow-craftsmen. It is in ideas that we are weak, while our neighbours are strong. I cannot call to mind a single English dramatic work that deals

with a given argument or expounds a general idea. Our playwrights are content to present to their public an episode, or at the most a character study. The idea never enters their mind of vindicating an ideal, of attacking a vice, or of depicting life in the light of some philosophical conception. They make fragmentary and incidental studies of life, and scatter paradoxical maxims, epigrams, and *bons mots* broadcast through their works. But it cannot be said that any one of them has ever developed that which the Germans call *Lebensanschauung*, that is to say a consistent and individual philosophy of life. . . .”

For this reason Archer has reckoned it part of his mission to bring his fellow-countrymen into touch with the works of German, French, and, above all, of Scandinavian dramatists. Hence, too, he has become the most efficient translator, interpreter, and commentator of the works of Ibsen and Björnson to be found in England, and perhaps in the whole of Europe. And the features of these foreign stage works that he brings into boldest relief are precisely those special qualities—that sense of reality, that tendency to generalize, that habit of observation and close study of life—which are most wanting in his compatriots. And why are they wanting? Listen to Archer.

“For our dramatists’ narrowness of outlook, at least nine-and-sixty reasons have been given, ‘and every single one of them is right.’ I propose, in the few words left me, to suggest a seventieth reason. It is to be found, I think, in the extreme centralization of our theatrical life. The moment a man enters upon a career as a playwright, he inevitably settles in London;

and London has none of that local self-consciousness which is the very mainspring of so many French, German, and Scandinavian dramas. Less in London than anywhere else is the individual life apt to come into conflict with the social machinery ; and when such conflict does arise, it is generally in ‘society,’ narrowly so called, which is practically a small city within the great city. Moreover, the different quarters of London are so vast that the denizen of one quarter sees little or nothing of the life of any other quarter, unless he makes special pilgrimages to look for it. The inhabitant of a small German city, on the other hand, has constantly before his eyes a compendium of social life from its highest to its lowest strata. If a law could be passed banishing our half-dozen leading dramatists to as many provincial cities for the next ten years, and at the same time placing Brighton, Homburg, and Monte Carlo ‘out of bounds’ for them, we should find our drama, at the end of that period, incalculably richer and more varied.”

In default of some such far-seeing provision for the regeneration of British dramatic art, Archer is content to pursue with prudence, tenacity, and genuine affection his laudable aim “of helping to provide for England a more serious and more worthy national stage, with nobler ideals, and of a more genuinely recreative character.” His criticism, ever incisive, judicious, subtle, and inspired by the ideal he has formed of the dramatic art, is freely bestowed on the playwrights of the day. Beginners, appealing to him for counsel, are advised not to write for the stage with the idea that it may prove a gold mine, nor to believe that success

can be assured by learning stage technique, or by studying the works of the best dramatists. To a young Australian, who asked him the secret of writing good plays, he said :—

“ You are to look at the life around you, and see what phases of it are capable of transference to the stage. If you see no such phases—if your impulse to write drama resolves itself into a desire to retell, with colourable alterations, the stories that have interested you in the theatre, and to pull the strings of a set of ready-made puppets—why, then, you had much better let drama alone. If, on the other hand, you have really something to say that can best be said in dramatic form, you will one day, by dint of patient thought and experiment, master that form for yourself. Every dramatist who is worth his salt is really self-taught. The works of others are useful mainly in teaching him what to avoid. The playwrights who are imitable are not worth imitating ; the masters keep their secrets to themselves. Not that I would dissuade you from reading any plays that are intellectually, or even technically, worth reading. All I say is—imitate as little, instead of as much, as you can.”

This is the *Leitmotif* of all William Archer’s critical work—the study of Life, and its portrayal upon the stage in its every manifestation, its every problem, its every social type. In the England of to-day his authority is of the highest, and his influence undoubtedly beneficial.

A critic not inferior to Archer in fame, but diverse in temperament, in culture, in style, and in standards of art, is Arthur Bingham Walkley of *The Times*.

Walkley, an Oxford man and *alumnus* of that same Balliol College which has given to the present generation a Viceroy, Lord Curzon, and a Proconsul, Lord Milner, is a critic of the classical school. Often—too often!—does he quote in the imposing columns of his paper the Greek philosophers and poets in their original text and character, thus vindicating his claim to be considered a Hellenist and a consummate Latin scholar, a profound and sagacious student of the antique stage. But neither the influence of the classics nor of *The Times* has withered his native freshness and vivacity. Even though he lecture the universe from the dignified rostrum of Printing House Square, though he quote Aristotle and Quintilian to his heart's content, still he is and will remain the least classical and the least ponderous of contemporary dramatic critics.

"*The Times* must sometimes thank its stars," wrote Shaw, to him, in the letter of dedication prefixed to *Man and Superman*, "that new plays are not produced every day, since after each such event its gravity is compromised, its platitude turned to epigram, its portentousness to wit, its propriety to elegance, and even its decorum into naughtiness by criticisms which the traditions of the paper do not allow you to sign at the end, but which you take care to sign with the most extravagant flourishes between the lines. I am not sure that this is not a portent of Revolution. In eighteenth-century France the end was at hand when men bought the *Encyclopædia* and found Diderot there. When I buy *The Times* and find you there, my prophetic ear catches a rattle of twentieth-century tumbrils."

Agreed! His criticisms are the most unprejudiced, dexterous, lively, breezy, and at the same time the most delightful in their freedom that can be conceived. They are veritable *bonnes bouches* for intellectual epicures.

His spirit and his style, on his own showing, are Parisian (he is an enthusiastic admirer of French literature—his only fault is to quote it, like Greek, too frequently!); and as a matter of fact his criticisms partake more than anything else of the nature of a *causerie*. But what Parisian possesses, or has ever possessed, a tithe of the exquisite and fascinating humour of Walkley? In respect of this quality he is British to the core. His *sous-entendus*, his refined mockery, his subtle and penetrating irony, are the very essence of the national style.

Like William Archer, Walkley is very severe on the contemporary stage. ("When I go to a theatre I always feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors!" he once remarked in a lecture at the Royal Institution.) The two eminent critics have many ideas in common. Walkley, too, deplores the absence of all broad and deep thinking on the part of English dramatists. He too considers that it is not the public that is to be blamed for the decadence of the stage, but the authors, to whom both truth and realism are foreign; he too has a sincere admiration for the best foreign writers, and took a brilliant part in the Ibsen controversy.

Nevertheless, apart from these points of contact, the ideas of the two critics are diametrically opposed. Archer regards criticism in the light of a mission;

Walkley takes a more modest and a more sceptical view of its functions. "Criticism," he says, "is merely the expression of opinion." According to Archer, the perfect critic should be the "guide, philosopher, and friend" of the dramatic author; Walkley is satisfied, whenever he encounters a bad play, to riddle it with the shafts of his merry wit. "C'est son métier,"—as Heine once remarked of the Supreme Being in his Judicial capacity. Morality forms both the basis and object of Archer's criticism; while those of Walkley's are purely æsthetic. The former is governed by certain fixed general principles; the latter reflects the immediate and capricious sensations of a given evening. That of Archer is virile, robust, and optimistic; while that of Walkley is elegant, lively, and barbed with irony. The very positions of the two critics in contemporary English literature are different. To his powers of controversy Archer adds initiative; while Walkley is purely a commentator, calm and somewhat sceptical, who has raised dilettantism to the level of a profession. The former has been compared to Lessing in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*; while the latter may be compared to Weiss, in his immortal *feuilletons* of the *Débats*.

I both could and should speak of other keen and authoritative critics, were I not afraid of becoming tedious. In the lamented decadence of English dramatic literature, criticism—that of a serious and responsible order—is the sole healthy, sturdy, and vital element, since even the acting—another element no less essential to the fortunes of the dramatic art—has

little to boast of. A century, or even half a century ago, the case was different. But the glories of Kean, Macready, Kemble, and Siddons now belong to history, and but yesterday Sir Henry Irving stood alone—the unique representative in England of the great tragic art.

Nor, after all, is this to be wondered at. In Italy, according to *Cyrano de Bergerac*, all are born actors; in England, on the contrary, it is rarely that any one possesses a natural gift of expression. The national temperament is hard and inelastic. In any other country this would be considered a defect; in England it is regarded as a privilege. And this is intelligible. Britons could never, in any circumstances, admit that they have reason to envy other nations. If they were born to-morrow with only one leg, they would quickly find means of demonstrating that both æsthetically and practically they were better off than any foreigners! Moreover, this inborn stiffness of theirs is further deliberately and artificially cultivated. Boys are taught even at school to repress all gesticulation; members of the House of Commons take pains to avoid it; while barristers address the court with their hands in their pockets.

When two Frenchmen or two Italians pass along a London street discussing the weather, they convey to the average Briton the impression that they are on the point of coming to blows. So different are we, both within and without! I do not say that, compared with the nervous exuberance of our own gestures, British imperturbability has no advantages. For my own part, I can even admire and envy it. In social

relations—at meetings and debates, at public functions—this stiffness of theirs may at first exercise a somewhat repellent influence ; but, if so, it errs on the side of gravity and dignity.

It is on the stage alone that it constitutes a serious defect. That is beyond question. The actor must of necessity possess the faculty of mimicry, and know how to convey his ideas, as Buffon puts it, *au corps par le corps*. Now the faculty of mimicry—of course, with rare exceptions—is precisely what is absent from the composition of the English actor. His gestures are always correct, because they are studied ; but they are never spontaneous, never natural. For this reason I can tolerate him more readily in tragedy than in modern social comedy. Want of naturalness offends us less in Roman personages who drape themselves in the toga and talk blank verse, than in up-to-date characters who dress, feel, and speak as we do ourselves. And this lack of naturalness is more or less evident—and deplorable—according to the sentiments the actor has to express. In conveying irony, the English actor is in his element ; in comic parts, he is simply grotesque. The buffoon may occasionally be found upon the English stage ; the brilliant comedian, never. In tragic parts he invariably assumes an exaggerated gravity and solemnity ; in sentimental rôles he is frankly ridiculous.

Curious to relate, in English dramatic companies there is no First Lover. Possibly this is also the case in real life ! The art of love (remarks one of Ibsen's characters) comes from the South—like tea ; and this may be the truth. The late Mrs. Craigie once took

a French friend to a London theatre. At the end of the piece he said, “I know now what the British expression ‘love-making’ means. It is something like a quadrille for two. The couple exchange seats, join hands at intervals, and talk at the top of their voices the whole time.” Again, most true!

I do not know why English stage lovers should find it necessary to shout their love with such vehemence. I remember once being present at Drury Lane at the rehearsal of a play in which a young actor had to come on and address a few words to his lady-love, whom he had found again after a long separation. The actor entered like one possessed, and apostrophized the girl in such tones that Sir Henry Irving was forced to interpose and calm him.

“No, no, my dear fellow, that won’t do at all! What harm has the poor girl done to you that you should terrify her so?”

This defect in vocalization—a matter so important to the actor, himself *vox et præterea nihil!*—is characteristic not only of the stage lover, but of almost all English dramatic artists. Their delivery is declamatory. They either sing or shout. Nor could it be otherwise; for the Englishman can neither gesticulate nor speak with force. Yet the actor should be able to control both action and voice; that is, should be able to control his own temperament. That is his whole secret.

In temperament also the Italian actor is superior to his English colleague; in other matters he may have somewhat to learn from him—if comparisons will not offend the susceptibilities of our own worthy comedians! Criticism—I am rather of Walkley’s mind in

this matter—is simply the expression of an opinion. Let them, then, take mine for what it is worth.

In my opinion, among other things, English actors dress their parts better than Italians, with greater attention to the characters they represent, and to the atmosphere of the play. They wear their clothes better, and with greater elegance and propriety. The actresses' *toilettes* are gorgeous, and after the most important "first nights" certain newspapers invariably publish, immediately following the article of their dramatic critic, a description by a lady journalist of the dresses worn by the principal performers.

English actors while on the stage are more conscientious than ours. They are always letter-perfect in their parts. The prompter is neither seen nor heard. They study, rehearse, and rehearse over and over again, and a manager will not risk the production of a new piece until he is absolutely certain of his ground. Irving studied the part of Hamlet for ten years before attempting its interpretation upon the Lyceum boards.

Individually, English actors—I speak of the principals—are more cultured than our own, and possess to a greater degree the dramatic literary sense. Irving devoted much study to Shakespearian literature, writing in the principal reviews, and delivering lectures at the universities and academies. His style is admirable in its clearness, elegance, and humour.¹ Beerbohm Tree, too, is a writer and orator of the highest order.² Irving's

¹ See his book, *The Drama*.

² See his lecture "On some Interesting Fallacies of the Modern Stage."

first-born, who follows worthily in his father's footsteps, and has already gained laurels of his own by an intellectual interpretation of the name part in *Hamlet*, studied at the University of Oxford. The actors Bourchier and Benson are also University men. The latter discoursed to me one evening in his dressing-room at the Kennington Theatre, between the acts of *As You Like It*, on the causes which favoured the development of the dramatic art in Greece, Rome, and the England of Elizabeth, as an erudite and genial professor of literary history might have done.

It is owing to their attainments that English actors find themselves at no disadvantage in the company of scholars, statesmen, savants, novelists, poets, and artists. They do not form a caste apart—they do not live by themselves, breathing only the impure and vitiated air of the footlights; on the contrary, they constantly come into contact with the choicest spirits among their audiences. The actors' club, the Garrick, also counts among its members the most distinguished names in literature and science. In Italy, actors dwell apart as members of one great family—with what harmony we all know! In England, on the contrary, their aim is to mingle and blend with the great family of the nation.

But yesterday, I repeat, Sir Henry Irving stood alone—the unique representative in England of the great tragic art. The enthusiastic cheers of the spring of 1905 yet ring in my ears. “Irving! Irving! Irving!” The public absolutely insisted on calling him once more to the footlights, before they would leave the theatre after the last act of *Becket* at Drury

Lane. "Irving! Irving! Irving!" The great actor reappeared for the twelfth time. He had already returned thanks, and delivered the usual speech. What else was there for him to say! He smiled, bowed, and waving his hand with a familiar gesture, he said "Good-bye!" "No! no! Not good-bye!" "Well, then, good night!" exclaimed Irving, still with a smile, and retired.

After that evening he was never seen again on a London stage. In August he started for a tour in the provinces, and on the 13th of October, returning to the Midland Hotel, Bradford, after acting his favourite part in Tennyson's tragedy, he fell into a seat, suddenly smitten by heart-failure. And in Bradford—one of those Northern cities where Puritanism has always fought the stage as enthusiastically as it has fought the Devil—he died. He fell on the enemy's very out-works, at the moment of victory, with the cheers still ringing in his ears.

"Good night!" The actor's fame has been compared to the fruit picked by Chateaubriand on the shores of Lake Asphaltis, whose rind, gilded by the sun's rays, contained but a handful of ashes. But either the parable is false, or else beneath the glamour of Irving's name there lay some quality too solid and durable for the hand of Time so easily to scatter to the winds.

Irving may or may not have been a great actor. In England he certainly stood for a dramatic force. By his genius, his learning, and his personal character, he elevated his art to the highest pitch of honour and dignity. He brought back in triumph to the very

heart of London that Shakespeare who had been banished for thirty years to an obscure theatre in a northern suburb. His noble and imposing figure cast a shadow of gravity and dignity across the most frivolous and the most vulgar stage on the face of this earth.

His biographers describe with admiration the strenuous efforts by which he opened up a path for himself, in the face of innumerable difficulties and obstacles. On entering the dramatic profession it is the custom for English actors to assume a stage name, and Irving was no exception to the rule. His real name was John Henry Brodribb, and he was born on February 6th, 1838, at Keinton Mandeville, near Glastonbury—the Avalon of King Arthur—in that west country which is the most romantic region of England. The Abbey of Glastonbury was founded on the spot where the staff of Joseph of Arimathea fell, took root, and became the Thorn that flowers at Christmas. The father of Sir Henry was a humble tradesman, poor in worldly wealth and unenterprising in spirit; but his mother was a woman of intellect, and the future celebrated actor was brought up by her, partly in Somerset, partly in Cornwall—still farther to the west—in the little town of Helston, which is reputed to have fallen from the hand of the Devil, and whose inhabitants are called to this day “dragons.” From that distant region, where yet linger the tongue and the dreams of the Celt, Irving may perchance have derived that spirituality, that love of the romantic and the heroic which were always manifest in his tastes and his methods of artistic expression.

But he came to London at a very early age, in 1849, and because he had never read anything but the Bible and *Don Quixote*, he was sent to school for two or three years. From school he passed into a house of business trading with India, and spent a further two or three years in copying letters and doing sums. This occupation, however, was by no means congenial to him. He had commenced attending a school of elocution, and a passion for declamation had gradually taken possession of him. He read and learned by heart passages from Shakespeare, and then declaimed them. Sometimes, while at the office, he would slip away and conceal himself in a packing-case, in order to finish a book in which he was absorbed, or to study a scene which he was to recite in the evening. Pence were scarce with him in those days, but he lived on tea and bread-and-butter, and thus was able to save sufficient to enable him to go two or three times a week to see Phelps, who was preserving Shakespeare from oblivion at Sadler's Wells, in the north of London. He even succeeded in getting an introduction to him, and asked him for an engagement in his company. "You want to be an actor, my boy? No, no, it is a wretched profession!" was Phelps's reply. But the advice was of no avail. Armed with a letter of introduction from a second-rate actor, one Hoskins, he obtained admission to a company which was playing in the provinces, at Sunderland, and thus commenced his *Via Crucis*.

It turned out a long and thankless road. For twenty years—from 1856 to 1876—he wandered from town to town, playing in the aggregate about seven hundred

different parts. Discouragements, nervousness (he once forgot his part, and fled from the stage in the middle of an act!), failures, hisses, long periods of "resting," marked his path, as they do that of all artists who are resolved to succeed, and have the good fortune not to succeed too early. In 1866 he made his mark in a play of Boucicault's at Manchester, and soon afterwards came to London, where he made a favourable impression upon the critics. One evening Charles Dickens too went to see him, and on leaving the theatre said to a friend: "If that young man does not some day become a great actor, set me down as an ignoramus."

That day was yet distant, but it came at last. In 1871 Irving was playing at the Lyceum, at that time under the management of Bateman—Colonel Bateman, to give him his full title! The season had been going from bad to worse, and Bateman was in despair. Irving proposed that he should produce a version of the *Juif Polonais* of Erckmann-Chatrian. The manager hesitated; the melodrama appeared to him feeble and devoid of interest. But at last he yielded, and on the evening of November 25th, 1871, there appeared for the first time in the Lyceum bills *The Bells*—an announcement henceforth destined to be constantly repeated, wherever Irving went, for thirty-four years, the last occasion being at Bradford, a few days before the death of the great actor.

The Bells is a genuine melodrama. Mathias, landlord of a country inn in Normandy, now in the declining years of a respected life, is seated one evening by the fire with his wife, his daughter, and two friends.

Suddenly, in the midst of their familiar conversation, he is seized by the haunting remorse of his crime. A cricket sings in the neighbouring wall, and to the ear of Mathias its song recalls the sound of the bells borne by the horse of the Polish Jew whom he had murdered. This haunting horror strikes the dominant note of the whole play. In the last act Mathias stretches himself upon his bed, dreams, and lives his dream upon the stage. It seems to him that his crime of long ago has been discovered. Now he is dragged a prisoner to the assizes. The judge interrogates him, and piles up proof upon proof against him. He denies everything. So many years have elapsed since the crime, and his honourable character is hallowed by the respect of two generations! . . . But the judge conceives a stratagem. He summons a hypnotist, and under the influence of a magnetic trance Mathias confesses, revealing all the details of the murder—how he had robbed his victim, how he had cast the corpse into a furnace and scattered its ashes to the winds. He awakes from the trance, the written notes of his confession are placed before his eyes, and stricken with terror the old man falls to the ground, and dies.

It is a weird and ghastly play, but it affords extraordinary opportunities to an artist. At the Comédie Française it was first played by Got, and then by Paul Mounet. Coquelin too was desirous of playing Mathias; but in the judgment even of French critics, among them Georges Bourdon, manager of the Odéon, none of these artists succeeded in creating so impressive a part out of Erckmann-Chatrian's melodrama as Irving. I am told that at the Comédie the

dream was in some fashion materialized (to use the correct spiritualistic expression), and that in the last act judge, hypnotist, gendarmes, and all the accessories of the Assize Court were actually presented on the stage. But to Irving's intelligence, in the expression of the dream the one dramatic figure was that of the murderer, and the real tribunal before which he was summoned was that of conscience. Hence he caused his stage to be shrouded in complete darkness, while Mathias wrestled with his remorse beneath the rays of a limelight, which followed him throughout the phases of his hallucination. When the hypnotist entered, only his hands were visible in the beam of light, and it is impossible to conceive an effect more weird.

The success of *The Bells* was overwhelming. The next morning the critic of the *Daily Telegraph* spoke of Irving as a revelation. He was sent for and reproved by his editor for bestowing such unseemly panegyrics upon an actor hitherto almost unknown. But the editor himself went the same evening to the Lyceum, and was compelled to recant his opinion. Thenceforward Irving's career was a succession of triumphs. Critics were not always unanimous in their opinion of his interpretations, but the public remained steadfastly under the spell of his art. It is needless to recall that evening of October 31st, 1874, which is recorded in letters of gold in the annals of the English stage. After studying the play for ten years, Irving produced *Hamlet*, and gave the most sincere, human, animated, intellectual, and novel reading of the part that had been seen on the stage since the days of Garrick and Kean. *Hamlet* was followed,

with greater or less success, by nearly all the Shakespearian masterpieces. In 1879, Irving became lessee and manager of the Lyceum Theatre, which remained for a quarter of a century the temple of English dramatic art. One of his first acts was the exclusive engagement of Miss Ellen Terry—charming, intelligent, and fascinating in her grace and humour. Miss Ellen Terry, who although in the autumn of her years is still first among English actresses, passed as a vision of loveliness among the artists of her adventurous youth. She married the great painter, G. F. Watts, but left him to return to the stage and its free and unconstrained existence. In conjunction with Irving, she was an irresistible Portia, a sweet and gentle Ophelia, and a terrible Lady Macbeth.

Irving appeared in, altogether, about seven hundred parts, and this is in itself no small performance in a country where, owing to the system of "long runs," a play may hold the boards for a year, or even two, without a break. Still, he was not equally happy in all of these. As Romeo, as Benedick, as Iago, as Coriolanus, as Claude Melnotte—to mention a few leading instances—he always seemed at his weakest. His Othello, by the unanimous judgment of the English critics, was inferior to that of Salvini; and I can personally affirm that his Shylock and his Louis XI will not bear comparison with those of Ermete Novelli, who is unfortunately unknown to English playgoers. But Irving was an artist apart. He could not be judged in the light of the single rôles he interpreted: he had to be considered in relation to the whole complex creation of the tragedy or play he was producing. He was not an

emotional actor; his greatness was of the intellect. To him, a play was not made up of certain episodes, but of certain general effects. In fact, in contradistinction to nearly all his fellow-actors, it was not the *part* but the *play* that he loved. In this lay his inferiority as an actor and his pre-eminence as an artist. It is owing to this too that, rather than a great Hamlet or a great Richard III, he was a great Shakespearian actor—that he presented and interpreted the work of the greatest of tragic poets in its diverse aspects of poetry, beauty, and sentiment. Nothing in the repertory of modern plays ever tempted him ; the comedy of present-day social life appeared to him the apotheosis of vulgarity. He always needed an atmosphere that was fanciful and unreal—an atmosphere of romantic mystery or historical grandeur. Becket, Robespierre, Dante, Charles I, Louis XI, and King Arthur were his favourite parts. In melodrama, the characters of Mathias (*The Bells*) and Corporal Brewster (*A Story of Waterloo*), owing to the violent contrasts to which they lend themselves, best suited his temperament. His elocution was full of mannerisms, but the public had become accustomed to them. He occasionally mouthed his speeches in a peculiarly irritating manner. His voice—always unpleasing—often took on intonations which were harsh and cavernous. His delivery was accompanied by such unaccountable pauses, and in some cases his gait was so slow, that he gave the impression of downright uncouthness. But, I repeat, he was more than the player of a part, he was the play itself ; and this it was that he fostered with rare intelligence and incomparable taste.

Thus the fact remains that his real unassailable

greatness lay in stage management. In this art he was the master and the apostle, as Kean had been the pioneer. If the *mise en scène* at the principal London theatres is now a thing unique and superb, it is all owing to Irving and the wise and encouraging object-lesson afforded by the Lyceum under his management.

It was impossible for Irving to conceive either tragedy or drama save as an harmonious and perfect whole. No doubt a fine dramatic work and a great actor together will always triumph, even without any special *mise en scène*. But the *mise en scène* has the same effect on the fortunes of a comedy or a drama that advertisement has on those of a book. If the book be good, advertisement will draw attention to its merits. If the play be good, the better it is mounted, the more acceptable will it be to the public taste. A drama or a comedy resembles a text, the meaning of which is interpreted by the staging and acting. Of this Irving was convinced ; and in the case of every work that he produced he was preoccupied, above all, in contriving the best methods of interpreting its meaning.

On the stage he was like a general on the field of battle. Nothing escaped him—not even the smallest and most insignificant detail. His taste was most subtle, and his eye unerring. He had a genius all his own in the matching of materials and colours, in combining effects of light, in creating life-like illusions of truth and suggestions of poetry. The most faithful and yet the most completely ideal reproduction of Venice I have ever seen was neither in a picture nor a panorama ; it was at the Lyceum, in the spring of 1898, when Irving was playing Shylock.

But if Irving must be considered as the Master, there are other London actor-managers who are also unsurpassed in stage management: Tree at His Majesty's, Harrison and Maude at the Haymarket, Wyndham at the Criterion and Wyndham's Theatre, Alexander at the St. James's, Robertson at the Comedy, Terry at Terry's Theatre, and others.

M. Georges Bourdon, formerly manager of the Odéon, has made a comparison between the *mise en scène* of the *Chemineau* of Richepin in Paris, and that of the same work (under the title of *Ragged Robin*) in London, and his conclusion is that in this art the English are far superior to his own compatriots. And yet it is not in the scene-painting either that this superiority lies. English scene-painters lately formed themselves into the *Scenic Artists' Association*, and organized an exhibition of their work at the Grafton Gallery. Their landscapes and distances, good as they are, still fall far behind the dainty grace of the French scene-painters; neither have Italians anything to learn from them. In fact, but a short time ago Russell invited our excellent Rovescalli to London to paint the scenery of the new Waldorf Theatre.

The superiority of English *mise en scène* is due not so much to the scene-painter as to the actor-manager, who devotes the most scrupulous attention to the general effect of the decoration, which in his hands plays a very real part in the drama—that silent part which every author imagines and desires, but has not in his power to create. It is due also to the scrupulous accuracy of the accessories, whence it results that on the boards of His Majesty's or of the Haymarket a tree

is a tree, and a pillar a pillar—not a strip of shaking canvas. It is due, above all, to the luxury and wealth which render it possible to spend large sums upon it. Tree did not hesitate to spend £600 on flowers for a single act of *Ragged Robin*, and £240 for every night of *Julius Cæsar*. The mounting of some of Irving's plays cost fabulous sums; that of Sardou's *Dante* amounting to about £20,000!

Actor-managers have gone to such lengths in this direction, that now the *mise en scène* cannot be sufficiently gorgeous to please the public taste.

The British public—let me repeat—goes to the theatre in search, not of intellectual enjoyment, but of a placid and comprehensive gratification of all the senses. On the stage it expects to behold palatial edifices, gorgeous dresses, spectacular effects; in the auditorium propriety, elegance, and comfort. The characteristic English taste for a judicious combination of utility and beauty nowhere reveals itself to greater advantage than at the theatre. Thither do the Briton and his womankind resort, arrayed in full evening panoply, in calm expectation of a reception befitting the guests of a peer's drawing-room, rather than the patrons of a place of public entertainment.

Instead of servants in livery, attendants, scrupulously attired, meet him at the door, and conduct him to his stall. The entire organization of the theatre reflects that special and aristocratic conception of its status which is the point of view of its patrons. The very vestibule itself agreeably impresses the visitor. Whether it be decorated in marble or in artistically inlaid wood, there will always be a luxurious carpet

and a rich profusion of flowers. The corridors, their walls either painted or upholstered in rich materials, are tastefully lighted by small burners which diffuse a subdued and delicate light through their silken shades. On entering the house, the stranger will not be struck either by its size or by the richness of its decorations. An English theatre is generally small, simple in style, and not overladen with ornament. But even on first glancing around one is struck by its convenience. The floor of the house gradually rises towards the back, in such manner that the last row of the spectators would be almost on a level with the first tier of boxes in an Italian theatre. The stalls themselves are well padded and elegant, with a seat which rises automatically when not in use. There is plenty of room between the rows to pass without bruising one's knees. Each stall is furnished with an opera-glass, available for use on the insertion of a sixpenny-piece in a small money-box. The orchestra is invisible. The two proscenium boxes are the only ones in the house. But the balconies, of which there are two, or at the most three, describe an extensive arc, and not a semicircle as in Italy. Thus all the seats are arranged at an angle which, even for those occupying places at the sides, is but slightly removed from the perpendicular line of the stage; so that an unimpeded view can be obtained from any point.

The house is judiciously lighted in such wise as to tone down all colouring into a very subdued key. Fresh air is freely admitted during the performance by means of special ventilators, which free the atmosphere from that sense of oppression which is often ex-

perenced after two or three hours spent in an Italian theatre.

On each floor there is a luxurious buffet and a cloak-room. The cloakrooms reserved for ladies are particularly elegant, being furnished with large mirrors, combs, brushes, pins, powder, and all other toilet requisities. Between the acts female attendants in black hand round trays with tea, ices, chocolate, biscuits, and sweets; or offer for sale special programmes of the entertainment artistically illustrated, or pamphlets descriptive of the play. I remember that during the first season of *Julius Cæsar*, at His Majesty's, Mr. Tree placed on sale in his theatre an extremely elegant illustrated souvenir, with notes on the meaning and associations of that particular tragedy both in history and on the stage.

These and other delicate attentions and dainty refinements impart to the English theatre an atmosphere of unaffected and genial good breeding, to the maintenance of which the attitude of the public contributes not a little. The special characteristic of London theatres, which has always made the most agreeable impression upon me, is their quiet—no slamming of doors, no shuffling of feet, no loud conversation or exclamations, no discussions. In short, none of that coming and going, standing up, turning round, fidgeting, and collecting in groups that is so frequent in Italian theatres.

As the curtain rises the lights are lowered, and such stillness prevails among the audience that one could almost hear the buzzing of a fly. Expressions of approval or disapproval—both less frequent than in

Italy—are made in a subdued and dignified fashion at the close of each act, and hardly ever during the action of the play. It is not until the performance is over that the public expresses, not without warmth, its sentiments towards the actors or the author.

In Italy a new play is sometimes so heartily hissed after one or two acts, that the manager is obliged to cut short the performance and proceed forthwith to the farce. This never happens in England, partly because every "first night" is attended by a *claque*, judiciously posted and naturally well disposed. Not that these "first-nighters" are paid to applaud, as in Paris or Vienna. Neither are they labelled as *claqueurs*. They are simply "enthusiasts," and their name is Legion!

The actor-manager has his own particular circle of enthusiasts; stage-manager, actress, and author all have theirs. A note dispatched to the actor-manager on the eve of a first night, palpitating with admiration for his great talents, will—almost to a certainty—even without the advantage of a personal acquaintance, be rewarded with the coveted "order." The "enthusiasts" are posted in the front rows of the pit and gallery, and at appropriate intervals lead the applause. It is they who salute the actor-manager, after the curtain has fallen, with persistent demands of "Speech! speech!" And it is to the request of these good and faithful friends that he accedes at last, in a voice broken by emotion, due to their spontaneous and generous reception!

It is true, though, that there are not wanting even in England first-nighters who are enthusiasts, and yet independent. Bourchier once related the following anecdote.

"My present servant or 'dresser,' as they are called at the theatre, was one of the original gallery first-nighters, and of the celebrated Gaiety gallery boys. Of course, when he joined me I imagined he had forsaken the auditorium for the stage. One night, however, recently, a play was produced by me the dress rehearsal of which he had seen, and I noticed that he seemed particularly gloomy and morose at its conclusion. On the first night when I came back to my dressing-room from the stage, I found the door locked, and it was clear that he had got the key and mysteriously disappeared. I had the door broken open, and sent another man to search for my missing dresser. The sequel is as follows. He was caught red-handed in the gallery among his old associates loudly 'boeing' me. Arraigned before me, he maintained the firmest attitude possible, and when questioned by me asserted, 'No, sir; I am your faithful servant behind the scenes, but as an independent man and honest gallery boy, I am bound to express my unbiassed opinion either for or against any play which I may happen to see at a first night.'"

A youth of stern integrity indeed! and a distant but worthy descendant of the English playgoer of an age when "enthusiasm," reticence, good form, meek resignation, and facile contentment were equally unknown to the playgoing public. That same English theatre which now conveys to the foreigner such a peculiar impression of propriety, of order, of imperturbability, was for centuries the most turbulent and revolutionary in the whole of Europe!

From the time of Charles II, at the Restoration,

until that of George III, public feeling ran as high concerning the merits of actors and plays as it did upon political questions. Parties were formed, and pitched battles took place in the pit and gallery. Suppose, for instance, a manager raised the prices of admission, or dismissed an actor who was popular with the public. The next evening it would be impossible for the performance to take place. Hisses and howls were blended in a diabolical uproar, while fisticuffs, altercations, and duels were the order of the day! It was frequently necessary to station in the middle of the pit a magistrate, whose duty it was, when the turmoil had reached a certain height, to pull out a candle, light it, and proceed to read the Riot Act, declaring the theatre in a state of siege.

On other occasions, as at the Haymarket in 1738, the public displayed such a hostile and menacing disposition that the actors were compelled to make their appearance on the stage between two files of Grenadiers with fixed bayonets and muskets levelled.

Performances were conducted in the midst of interruptions, insults, and tumults. A bad example was set by the royal box, whence George III was accustomed to maintain a running fire of loud comment on the play and its acting. Criticisms frequently degenerated into disputes, and disputes into personal assaults. The citizens in the pit pulled noses, while the gentlemen unsheathed their swords. On one occasion two of the latter leaped upon the stage, and gratified the public with the spectacle of a sanguinary duel in real earnest. Another time certain noblemen caused so much annoyance to the actors by their banter, that the latter in-

continently fell upon them and administered a well-deserved drubbing.

It is not so very long ago that two grenadiers, posted one on either side of the proscenium at Covent Garden during the performance, bore witness to the bellicose habits of the playgoing public. One evening one of these sentries was so overcome by the tragic power of Garrick's acting that he dropped his halberd and fell fainting to the ground. Garrick sent him a glass of whisky and a guinea. The next evening the second grenadier thought fit to faint, but this time Garrick remained unmoved. Not so, however, the Government, by whom the sentries were shortly afterwards abolished. The character of the playgoing public had changed for the better, and the grenadiers were now an anachronism.

CHAPTER VIII

THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE

THE transition from the commercial English to the national Irish stage is like passing from an Oxford Street shop, glittering with tinsel and sham diamonds, to one of those clumsy stalls upon which wooden utensils and other objects wrought by peasant hands, are offered for sale at country fairs. Simple and primitive, artless, and even grotesque these wares may be—but a labour of love to the humble craftsman as he fashioned them out of the sound honest wood that grew on his own native soil. The rustic stock-in-trade may have been jumbled together by a hand innocent of the seductive art of window-dressing, but the stalls are pitched in the cool shade of an ancient horse-chestnut, while the whole scene is flooded with joyous sunlight, and fresh breezes fill the air with the festive sound of village bells.

The wayfarer whose eye is accustomed to the pretentious, flaunting shop-windows of the city will pause to observe with sympathetic curiosity the modest productions of an art so sincere and so spontaneous. It is with a like sense of indescribable satisfaction that we turn from the commercial English stage—with all its huckstering vulgarity, its gorgeous settings of vapid inanities, its gilded stucco and its unreal atmosphere—

to enter this lowly and unadorned, but genuinely poetic country playhouse.

For the drama we have here was also fashioned—a labour of love—from sound honest native materials; and here, too, all around is joyous sunlight, fresh breezes, and holiday bells. Old Ireland, that sound and sturdy tree, beaten to the ground, but not bent, by the force of the hurricane, spreads above it the shade of her destinies, of her poignant memories, of her wandering fancies.

Few—possibly none—of the Italian reading public have ever heard of this drama; in fact, the Irish national stage is almost unknown even in England. It is but a thing of yesterday, and only one out of many offshoots of that tender and delicate Spring-time of song, myth, romance, and legend, which is called the Celtic Renaissance.

During the struggle for Home Rule, the nation's whole energy and activity were concentrated on politics. That love of knowledge which the Irish claim to be indestructible in Ireland, was absolutely imperceptible during that period of storm and stress. Art, literature, and poetry seemed to have lost every attraction for a generation that had thrown itself headlong into Parliamentary conflicts, secret conspiracies, and political agitations. But the fall of Parnell gave the signal for a painful and a rude awakening. Victory, which for a moment had appeared within the grasp of the Nationalists, suddenly receded to a point almost below the political horizon. The disorganization of the Parnellite party, the fall of Gladstone, the conquest of Westminster by the Unionists, the revolt of public

opinion in England against every idea of Home Rule, the Conservative and Imperialist reaction, lasting for more than ten years—all conspired to dash the hopes and dispel the cherished dreams of the Irish Nationalists.

The protracted conflict and its disastrous issue were succeeded by a period of enforced inaction, of disillusion, and of searching of hearts. And it was now that Ireland sought a new outlet for those energies which—to the neglect of the loftier elements of her national genius—she had devoted for so many years, amidst toil and tribulation, to the pursuit of political and agrarian reforms. It was now, when for the moment all hope of attaining her independence had vanished, that she felt the need of asserting her personality in some different fashion, of revivifying her faith at the perennial fountain of her ancestral genius, of seeking a haven of refuge in the Spirit of her land and of her history. Hence arose the movement, commenced about 1890, to which has been given the name of the Celtic Renaissance.

A characteristic of this movement is its hall-mark of genuine rusticity. In Ireland the peasant is the depositary of the national literature, or rather of all that treasury of myths, legends, traditions, romances, and ballads, which form its texture. Throughout the succession of the ages, and amidst the dire vicissitudes of his history, has the Irish peasant, almost by a miracle, preserved that delicate magic fabric of fancy which he has woven like a luminous atmosphere about his daily existence.

The Irish peasant is a strange being. From the

Anglo-Saxon point of view he is a miserable wretch for whom the future holds no potentialities—a poor ignorant creature, indolent, superstitious, utterly incapable of progress. It is true that, in contrast to the English peasant, he has never experienced any temptation to desert the fields for the city, or to abandon an agricultural for an industrial life.

Misery and persecution have driven him reluctantly forth to seek his fortune in America; where he has developed magnificent capabilities, the existence of which in his character had been hitherto unsuspected. But this exodus both ever was and is still only accomplished in direct violation of his most cherished aspirations.

The ideal of the Irish peasant is to remain where he is, and to live the life of his father and grandfather, with the same hopes, the same beliefs, the same pleasures; and to this Arcadian ideal he sacrifices every other consideration of comfort, of well-being, of material and moral improvement. Neither does he hanker for fresh meat and vegetables every day, like the English peasant, nor desire to inhabit a neat and convenient cottage. He lives on potatoes, dwells in thatched cabins, and sleeps in the hay-loft—or in the stable with the cattle.

But he has other needs unknown to the English peasant—spiritual and ideal aspirations which are to him as the breath of life. The exigencies of his appetite are of small account, but those of his imagination are imperious. His one desire is to breathe the air of his valleys, enjoy the company of his fellows, listen to the homilies of his priests, and perpetuate the

habits and customs of his race. He is singularly attached to his village fairs, his dances, his holidays, his religious ceremonies, to the music of his pipers, and above all to that nebulous Celtic atmosphere of story, tradition, and legend which forms the background of his existence.

Between this artless existence and the world of dreams there is in Ireland no great gulf fixed, and the transition from one to the other is easy for the peasant. Indeed, it is in the latter rather than in the former that he is most often found. Nothing pleases him better than to gather round the hearth in the evening and listen to the tale of Cuchulain, who fought the sea for two days, until its waves passed over his head and drowned him ; of Caolte, who stormed the Castle of the Gods ; of Oisin, who wandered for three hundred years in Fairyland, vainly seeking peace ; and of all the other heroes and heroines of the great Celtic phantasmagoria—the inner meaning of which, as Yeats says, no man has ever yet been able to discover, no angel has ever yet revealed ! And besides these sagas and ancient legends, there is for him—precisely as there is for our poorer peasants in Lower Lombardy—an irresistible fascination in stories of fairies, demons, apparitions, “corpse candles,” hell-dogs and hell-cats, witches, wizards, and enchanted places. He has talked so much about these things, that the whole countryside is full of them, as of a natural product.

Hence it is not wonderful that Ireland, in the day that she undertook to rekindle the flame of faith in the spirit of her land and of her story, should have sought in this product the elements of a national art. “There

is no song or story handed down among the cottages that has not words and thoughts to carry one as far; for though one can know but a little of their ascent, one knows that they ascend like mediæval genealogies through unbroken dignities to the beginning of the world. Folk-art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted.”¹

It is on this soil that the exponents of the new Irish literature have for ten years been seeking herbs and flowers, colour and fragrance, wild notes and trills. From London or Dublin, where the greater portion of their year is passed in the struggle for existence, they fare forth every summer into the wilds of Ireland, vanishing amidst its hills and dales, conversing with peasants and fishermen, transcribing their legends and stories, gleaning their traditions, studying their habits and feelings, and toiling to give unity and form to their rudimentary artistic inheritance.

Stories are even told of youthful students who have spent whole evenings stretched on the roofs of humble cabins in order to listen, themselves invisible, to the ancient Gaelic songs of certain shepherds.

Synge, one of the most typical of these writers, for several years in succession passed the summer in the Island of Arran, living in common with the fishermen, speaking their tongue and eating at their tables. Yeats,

¹ W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p. 232.

the soul of the Renaissance, founded his *Celtic Twilight* upon the narratives of a goodwife of County Mayo and the stories told him by Paddy Flynn, a village character in County Sligo. Paddy Flynn, by the way, fell a victim to the new literary movement. A friend of Yeats one day presented him with a bottle of whisky, and the old man—sober though he was both by nature and by habit—was roused to such a pitch of enthusiasm by the sight of so much liquor all at once, that he lived on it for days, and finally died of it!

In divers modes and through divers channels does young Ireland contribute to this graceful Celtic revival. Some there are who undertake the work of translation, and render into English ancient Gaelic romances, or that folk-lore which yet lingers on the lips of the peasantry. Lady Gregory, a woman of consummate ability, has discharged the same office for the heroic legends of Ireland that Malory did for those of the Arthurian cycle. She has collected, translated, selected, compressed, arranged, and welded these stories into a grand harmonious group. Others there are who draw from these primitive materials inspiration for an art that is both modern and original. The latter are the poets of the Celtic Renaissance—either epic and lyric, like Yeats, or religious, like the youthful Lionel Johnson, who died last year; or, again, mystic and symbolical, like G. W. Russell.

Others again, prose writers these, embroider upon the texture of the ancient Celtic myths historical romances, like Standish James O'Grady; or they compose tales, sketches, and novels, taking as their subject the lives, habits, and psychology of the modern

peasant—whose profile they sketch, with more or less success, against dreary Western backgrounds. And finally there are those who have undertaken the most herculean, and perhaps the vainest of tasks—that of resuscitating and breathing fresh life into the dead language of the country.

In certain districts of Ireland, as in the Highlands of Scotland, the Gaelic or Celtic tongue is still spoken, naturally with modifications produced by the lapse of ages, and by divers historical and local influences. In a few villages in the west of Ireland the peasants speak nothing but Gaelic, and do not understand a single word of English. Now the object of the Gaelic League, founded a few years since, is to rescue from oblivion this language, at present confined to an area which is continually contracting, to settle its grammar, orthography, and construction, to afford general facilities for its acquirement, and to elevate it once again to the dignity of literature. The League has attacked its task with an energy beyond all praise. Its adherents are counted by the thousand, and it has extended its ramifications to London, Canada, Australia, the United States, the Argentine Republic—in short, wherever Irishmen are to be found.

Novels, poems, and newspapers are written in Gaelic. Priests address their flocks from the pulpit in Gaelic; orators from the platform, actors from the stage. A Nationalist member even commenced to address the House of Commons in Gaelic, to the great indignation of the Speaker. Recently an attempt was also made to conduct postal correspondence in Gaelic; but it failed, owing to the impossibility of delivering many

of the letters and postcards, the postal officials being unable to read their addresses. A postcard, which remained lying for months in the Dublin Post Office because no one knew for whom it was intended, was the occasion of repeated tumultuous demonstrations on the part of the League, and even of questions in the House of Commons. Alas! it transpired that not even the person for whom it was intended had been able to decipher the superscription!

Although there are forty or fifty thousand persons in Ireland who speak Gaelic, there are very few who are acquainted with the written characters—totally different from the Roman, and very difficult to acquire—and who are able to read and write it correctly. Schools are provided to remedy this deficiency. Of these there are at present about two thousand in which Gaelic is taught, and in London classes are held at which Irishmen who have worked all day in the City give their services as amateur teachers to their compatriots. These classes are attended by men, women, and children, and even by old men of seventy or eighty years of age. When the lessons are over, the chairs are cleared away, and Irish dances are improvised to the sound of Irish airs. On St. Patrick's Day all repair with shamrocks in their buttonholes to the Westminster Cathedral, where the service is conducted in Gaelic, Gaelic hymns are sung by the League choir, and a sermon is preached by a Catholic bishop in the same language.

But is it likely that all this linguistic propaganda—sincere, enthusiastic, and well-meaning though it undoubtedly is—will ever produce any tangible result,

save that of keeping alive the national sentiment in its purest, noblest symbol? I very much doubt it.

Experiments of a similar character have been made elsewhere, and all such attempts have failed. They failed in Norway, where endeavours were made to revive the *bonde-maal*, or language of the country, in order that it might take the place of Danish, and become the written and national language. They failed—whatever may be said to the contrary—in Provence, even though there the *Langue d'Oc* had for its champion a poet of such genius as Frédéric Mistral. And they will continue to fail, whenever and wherever they may be made, unless the language that it is desired to galvanize has behind it a prolonged, uninterrupted, and pre-eminent literary tradition.

The more gifted among these same writers of the Celtic Renaissance—Irish though they be in thought, in feeling, and in imagination—have formed their style upon English literary models, and write admirable English. Even should they succeed in assimilating the Gaelic language they would do more harm than good to their cause, since they would renounce that great cosmopolitan public which would no longer read or understand them.

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893, and during the same period and the years succeeding it many other societies and institutions saw the light in Ireland, all animated by the common ambition of co-operating in the intellectual Renaissance of the country. In 1892 there was formed in Dublin the National Literary Society; in 1893 both the Irish Literary Society and the Irish Text Society, having as their object the re-

vision and publication of Irish texts; and, finally, in 1899, there was founded the Irish Literary Theatre, which was afterwards transformed into the Irish National Theatre.

In a movement of a popular character such as this, inspired by affection and zeal for the people, and intended to cultivate and purify the national sentiment in the minds of the people, it was natural that the drama—which is the literary form most accessible to the majority—should play a great part. But drama of a very special character was needed. In its repertory there could be no place for English plays, which depict a Society hateful and obnoxious to every good Irishman. Neither could the best works of foreign dramatic literature be presented, since their themes, their sentiments, and their problems are for the most part outside the scope of Irish life.

Ireland, it must not be forgotten, is a country which has not yet completed her historical evolution, and which will not complete it until she has solved the national problem. For the present, her idealism, her psychology, and her social ethics are all bound up in this question. The great philosophical problems which in one century have revolutionized European thought have not touched Ireland, which has remained deeply religious, bigoted, and Papist, simply because Catholicism appeals to her as a weapon wherewith to fight Protestant England. For the same reason, too, the social and economic problems of the day have left Ireland indifferent, because her attention is still concentrated on her own agrarian question, which possesses a character peculiar to itself.

In a word, the entire existence of modern Ireland is spent in an atmosphere analogous to that which characterized the existence of Italy during the early period of our Revolution, and her literature, like our own between 1821 and 1848, is romantic in form and patriotic in substance.

Hence it was essential that Irish drama should be rigorously national in character. In other words, it was necessary to create it. The Irish genius has always displayed histrionic tendencies; but playwrights and dramatists of Irish origin like Farquhar and Congreve, Goldsmith and Sheridan, Oscar Wilde and G. B. Shaw, possess no distinctive national characteristics. Their intellectual training was classical and English, and they wrote for an English public.

The first attempt, that of the Irish Literary Theatre, failed because the actors were English, and were wanting in intelligent sympathy both for their authors and their public. But in 1902 this institution, which owed its origin to the initiative of Yeats, Edward Martyn, and George Moore, was transformed into the Irish National Theatre. A talented Irish actor, Mr. W. Fay, gathered around him a company of Irish amateurs, and repeated with generous ardour and notable success the experiment made by Antoine with his *Théâtre Libre*.

Its early stages were beset with difficulties. The Irish National Theatre, destined to give expression to the dramatic genius of the race, lacked a playhouse! This was a small matter. At first the company toured from town to town, playing in halls and private drawing-rooms, without either stage, scenery, or stage dresses. Yeats suggested one or two costumes which

could be adapted to all the parts in all the historical plays. The actors had no stage experience. This also was a small matter! Since Racine wrote two of his most famous tragedies for schoolgirls, the youthful authors of the Celtic Renaissance might well write for amateurs.

This course they pursued for two years, until, in 1894, Miss Horniman, an Englishwoman and a friend of Ireland, undertook at her own expense the restoration of the old theatre of the Mechanics' Institute in Dublin, and made a present of it to the Society of the Irish National Theatre. The entire labour of restoration and decoration was undertaken by Irish craftsmen. The stained glass in the vestibule was the work of an Irishwoman, Miss Sarah Purser. The large brass frames were supplied from the Irish workshops at Youghal, and all the other accessories were the work of Irish hands.

Thus did Ireland obtain her national theatre. As to the repertory, as the result of four or five years' work it contains not less than forty plays, written by poets, men of letters, young girls, and even priests. These works are, for the most part, comedies or dramas in one act. Their dialogue is sound and true to nature, but their construction is usually crude, feeble, and primitive. Some of them are written and played in Gaelic, others in English. Their subjects vary, but their tone is always either serious or satirical. Some are of a political nature, and form part of the Nationalist propaganda, as, for instance, that written and played on the occasion of King Edward VII's visit to Ireland, and another dealing with the emigration problem.

Those of the latter class are the least meritorious. Next come the tragedies and plays of a national and historical character, animated by the same patriotic spirit that inspired the dramatic work of G. B. Niccolini. There is no lack, also, of poetical and symbolical works, but the best are those which reproduce scenes and types of peasant life, such as the works of J. M. Synge. The latter are at once the most sincere, the most natural, the most original, and the most interesting, constituting as they do a species of perspective illustration in dialogue of Irish folk-lore.

Of a very different character from the English stage, this Irish National Theatre has no commercial aims or ambitions. It commenced its existence with a capital of forty pounds, and rubs along as best it can. Its object is not to amuse, but to educate. It appeals, not to the eye and the senses, but to the heart and the intellect. It aims at setting forth all the hollow irony and the melancholy sweetness, the dreams and the memories, the loves and the sorrows that diversify the lives of the people, for whom and by whom it first saw the light. In short, it aspires to be above all a pure expression of the noble and the beautiful.

Yeats thus defines his own æsthetic principles: "We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement—a place where the mind goes to be liberated" (from every other preoccupation). "If we are to do this, we must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause. . . . Such plays will require, both in writers

and audiences, a stronger feeling for beautiful and appropriate language than one finds in the ordinary theatre. St. Beuve has said that there is nothing immortal in literature except style, and it is precisely this sense of style, once common among us, that is hardest for us to recover. . . . But if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage. I have been told that I desire a monotonous chant; but that is not true. . . . An actor should understand how to so discriminate cadence from cadence, and to so cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music. . . . We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama that is remote from real life. We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice, or from the few moments of intense expression, . . . we must from time to time substitute for the movements that the eye sees the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul. Just as it is necessary to simplify gesture that it may accompany speech without being its rival, it is necessary to simplify both the form and the colour of scenery and costume. As a rule the background should be but a single colour, so that the persons in the play, wherever they stand, may harmonize with it and preoccupy our attention. In other words, it should be thought out, not as one thinks out a landscape, but as if it were the background of a

portrait. . . . Even when one has to represent trees or hills they should be treated in most cases decoratively, they should be little more than an unobtrusive pattern. There must be nothing unnecessary, nothing that will distract the attention from speech and movement. An art is always at its greatest when it is most human. Greek acting was great because it did everything with the voice, and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement. But an art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of life, is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art."

William Butler Yeats is not merely the æsthetè of the new movement; he is its very soul and symbol.

Ireland has never possessed a poet who has revealed with greater truth, and at the same time with greater discretion, her secret and intimate charm—that mournful longing for the indefinite outside the vision of this world, that painful groping after all that is beyond expression by word or deed, that invincible disdain of reality which finds an outlet either in irony—which signifies looking at things from a superior height, or in a dream—which means not looking at them at all! “In the dim kingdom there is a great abundance of all excellent things. There is more love there than upon the earth; there is more dancing there than upon the earth; and there is more treasure there than upon the earth. In the beginning the earth was perhaps made to fulfil the desire of man, but now it has got old and fallen into decay. What

wonder if we try and pilfer the treasures of that other kingdom!"¹

Above all, no Irish poet has ever typified to a greater degree than Yeats that widespread, resigned sadness which is so characteristic of the race. Of all the nations in history, the Celts have been the least fortunate. They have never enjoyed one glorious hour of sunshine, but have always existed plunged, as it were, in a sluggish twilight of unsatisfied hopes and ambitions. Hence melancholy weighs like an inveterate, deeply rooted delusion upon their spirits, and casts a slight shadow over all their art.

Yeats is about forty years of age. He is of quite an original type, and once seen is never forgotten. Tall, thin, delicate in appearance, with a very long, straight-cut, typically Irish face; hollow cheeks, pointed chin, and a shock of hair which falls over and obscures the pallid, beardless features. A singular expression of melancholy is imparted to the face by two deep-set black eyes, of unusual shape, which seem accustomed to gaze on darkness and gloom.

He is a poet and a visionary. Born in Dublin, he passed a portion of his childhood in County Sligo, in a region where, as he himself has said, the peasant is always conscious of the presence of the supernatural round about him. Amidst those fantastic valleys and mysterious forests he found one day a "short cut to the kingdom of shadows." Later on he drifted to Dublin, Paris, and London, but of all the roads that the world or life itself has to offer, he has ever preferred that short cut, and ended by returning to it.

¹ W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p. 145.

It bears him before all towards the shadows of the Past. His epic poems are woven from the deeds and the heroes of the cycle of the Red Branch. *The Death of Cuchoolin* and *The Old Age of Queen Maeve* are vibrant with the pulsations of an heroic age. In *Fergus and the Druid*, Yeats has introduced a personal note, and has made the speech of the King of Ulster the vehicle of his own tumultuous yearnings.

Druid. What would you ?

Fergus. I would be no more a king,
But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

Druid. Look on my thin, grey hair and hollow cheeks,
And on these hands that may not lift the sword,
This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.
No maiden loves me, no man seeks my help,
Because I be not of the things I dream.

Fergus. A wild and foolish labourer is a king
To do and do and do, and never dream.

Druid. Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams ;
Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round.

In like manner *The Madness of King Goll*—that monarch who, bereft of reason, conceals himself in a valley near Cork, receives mystic messages from the spirit world, sees eyes which observe him during the night watches, hears the footsteps of beings invisible—is less a reflection of the legend than of the imaginative spirit of the poet. But the most celebrated of his poems is that entitled *The Wanderings of Oisin*. It relates the passion of Princess Niamh, a lovely Immortal, for Oisin, and how having cast a spell upon him by means of her beauty she carried him off with her, gliding over the green sea, till they arrived in the Land of

Eternal Youth, where she kept him with her for three hundred years. At the end of the three hundred years Oisin returns to Ireland, to find it entirely transformed. He had quitted it during the heroic age of the Pagan myths, and now sees it converted to Christianity, and submissively murmuring the prayers of St. Patrick and his monks. St. Patrick would convert him also, but Oisin cannot forget the world "that loved the roaring of laughter and song," and where there was

Nor languor nor fatigue : but endless feast,
And endless war.

He casts from him the rosary, and dies in the hope of once more rejoining the heroes, whether in Paradise or in Hell.

This poem is rich in beauties, and above all in lyric beauties. Yeats, enamoured though he be of the mythological and heroic world of the Celts, and in spite of his studies in epic models—Cervantes and Ariosto—is, and always will be, of an essentially elegiac temperament. His lyrics, his ballads, his songs and his elegies are full of spirituality and imagination, and are instinct with subtle, sweet, and attractive melody. Here his whole art seems concentrated in a single effort to capture some vagrant spark of the divine fire, and imprison it within a cloud of obscure imagery.

Yeats is a mystic, in love with a beauty that is unattainable, and like his hero in *The Secret Rose* he dreams of a

Woman of so shining loveliness
That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress.

But this unattainable beauty is all the more haunting

to him, since he has learned to catch glimpses of it in everything,

In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

Whence the agony of that perpetual illusion of possessing and losing which wrings from him the cry, "our souls—are an endless love and an endless farewell."

Most graceful are the ballads, of which the subject is furnished by humble tales of peasant life, and sweet are his idyllic songs. Nowhere in modern literature has the note of nostalgia been struck in a more feeling or graceful manner than in *Innisfree*, whither the poet desires to return in order to build himself a cabin of osiers, and to seek peace in its bright noondays and its "evenings full of linnets' wings."

But the lyric poetry of Yeats becomes purely and profoundly original when he loses himself, with voluptuous *abandon*, in the mazes of a vague and primitive mysticism. The entire outer world is to him arid and dusty. Its voices, its harmonies, its beauties, its fascinations are but a projection of the voices, the harmonies, the beauties, and the fascinations of the spirit. Life is in ourselves, and emanates from us, colouring all things with its own rays.

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there ;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the stars with merry light ;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night ;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.

Yeats has also brought all these ideal elements to bear upon his stage work. His comedies and dramas owe none of their inspiration to real life. Some of them came to him in dreams. Others are themselves genuine dreams dramatized. They are quite unadapted for the stage. They both have been and still are played, but only before a special audience whose own chief ambition is to dream.

The Countess Cathleen was one of his earliest dramatic works, and with it the Irish Literary Society inaugurated its experiment. The scene is "Ireland in the Past." The action develops during one of those famines which have from time to time devastated the country. Some are dying with the name of God upon their lips ; others, saying that "God and the Mother of God have fallen asleep," traffic with demons disguised as traders, who carry on a lurid system of barter by which they receive souls in exchange for gold. The Countess Cathleen is the great lady of the district which the famine holds in its grip, and she strains every nerve to save the unfortunate people both from the pangs of hunger and from the wiles of the demons. The latter, however, in their rage strip her of her last penny, and the Countess, herself reduced to poverty, is no longer able to succour the famishing peasants. What is to be done ? In despair at her own impotence in the presence of the ever-increasing horror of so much misery, she at last sells her own soul to the demons for a large sum of money, which she distributes among the poor. And thus she brings them salvation at the cost of her own eternal damnation. But in a vision at the close of the play we

learn that she is pardoned, since God judges by intentions, and not by works.

Nothing could be more Irish than this legend, which is marked by a strange mixture of religious fervour and mediæval superstition. Yeats has caught the spirit that sways the peasant's heart, and has preserved all its indefinable mystery. But in Ireland Christianity and Paganism intermingle, and continue to hold joint sway in every cabin and in every heart. In *The Countess Cathleen* Yeats has touched the first, and in *The Land of Heart's Desire* the second. The former is thrilled with a sense of self-sacrifice that is purely Christian; the latter with a wild, unrestrained, irresponsible, primitive instinct that is all Pagan.

The latter play is inspired by certain Irish tales of young wives carried away by the fairies. Mary, wife of Shawn, lives on dreams and pants for the joys of the Unknown, for the life of the winds and waves. She calls upon the fairies to transport her to another country, and her prayer is heard. Around this delicate, elementary, and shadowy plot the poet has woven his short and fantastic versified drama.

Cathleen ni Hoolihan, like the preceding work, goes straight to the heart of every true Irishman. It consists of only one act and one scene, but its representation in Dublin, in 1902, sent a thrill of enthusiasm throughout Ireland.

The scene is the interior of a cabin. Young Michael Gillane is to marry next day Delia Cahel, and old Peter, the father of Michael, is joyfully fondling between his hands the bag of money which represents the dowry of his future daughter-in-law. Here are all

the materials for a homely scene of domestic felicity ; but gradually the entire cabin is filled with a sense of unrest, and as if with a presentiment of something unknown, something invisible, something tragic in its nature. Enter a poor old woman whom no one knows, and who seats herself beside the hearth. She relates that certain foreigners have turned her out of her home, and have robbed her of her four fair green meadows (the four provinces of Ireland). She tells her tale ; she sighs and sings. She is not without hope. Many have loved her, but they who love her must give themselves to her body and soul, and be ready to die for her. Young Michael feels himself little by little drawn towards the poor old woman (*Cathleen ni Hoolihan*, or the *Shan Van Vocht* of the national song), and when the latter goes out he follows her as though hypnotized. Cries of joy are heard without. It is 1798, and the French have landed in Killala Bay. In vain Delia seeks to recall Michael to her side ; he rushes down with the neighbours to meet the liberators. A boy enters the cabin, and old Peter asks him, "Did you see an old woman going down the path?" "I did not," replies little Patrick ; "but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen."

Of Yeats's other dramatic works, two carry us back to the heroic age (*Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand*) ; one, *The Pot of Broth*, is a farce ; and the *Hour-Glass* is a mystic-philosophical scene on the lines of the mediæval "Morality." In all these there is the same sweet native tenderness, the same vague twilight atmosphere, the same hush of dream and mystery. Their characters move with the lightness of shadows,

as if afraid of breaking the spell that lies upon them.

But in *Where There is Nothing*, the longest and most consistent of Yeats's dramatic works, we discover a new and strange element, a kind of exotic anarchism, something suggesting Tolstoi and the East. The play is in five acts, and although it has actually been performed by the Stage Society, it cannot be said, any more than the rest, to possess a genuinely dramatic construction. Still, it contains some strong situations, and a few fleeting beauties of poetic thought.

The central figure is that of Paul Ruttledge, a rich country gentleman; intolerant of the society in which he has grown up—of its conventions, its hypocrisies, its base cupidity. Needless to say, he is an idealist, a mystic, dreaming of a life that is simple and pure; and although his iconoclastic theories may make him appear a terrible revolutionary, at bottom he is after all merely a harmless visionary, a *naïf*, with all the undisciplined ingenuousness of a saint. But he possesses at least the merit of consistency. Not content with putting his poetic ideas into words, he desires to express them in his life and actions. One fine day he doffs the garb of a gentleman, assumes the squalid rags of a travelling tinker, and is off! "I want to be a vagabond, a wanderer," he says to his brother, as he leaves him. "As I can't leap from cloud to cloud I want to wander from road to road. That little path there by the clipped hedge goes up to the high road. I want to go up that path and to walk along the high road, and so on and on and on, and to know all kinds

of people. Did you ever think that the roads are the only things that are endless ; that one can walk on and on and on, and never be stopped by a gate or a wall ? They are the serpents of eternity. I wonder they have never been worshipped. What are the stars beside them ? They never meet one another. The roads are the only things that are infinite. . . . ”

So Paul takes the path by the hedge, and reaches the high road. He joins a caravan of tinkers, and for some time leads their gipsy life and marries Sabina, one of their women. The tinkers laugh at his ideas, which are unintelligible to them ; but they too are animated by a spirit of revolt, and one day, while they are half drunk, they take the magistrates of the district and subject them to a species of trial. Paul, who presides, condemns them, because they do not lead the lives of the primitive Christians.

After many wanderings—both physical and mental—Paul falls sick, and is left by the tinkers at the gate of a monastery. The monks receive him into the convent, where all his eccentric idealism becomes gradually inflamed by an irresistible fanaticism. Paul becomes a monk, prays, fasts, falls into trances, and preaches to his brethren what the Superior calls dangerous heresies. The road to follow, he tells them, the one high road that leads to the Infinite, is that which passes over the ruins of all laws, of all philosophy and theology, of all worldly institutions, of all mundane things and hopes.

Standing close to the altar, and surrounded by the monks whom he has converted to his faith, the apostle

—pale, haggard, and shattered in health, speaks thus :—

Paul Ruttledge. . . . For a long time after their making men and women wandered here and there, half blind from the drunkenness of Eternity ; they had not yet forgotten that the green Earth was the Love of God, and that all Life was the Will of God, and so they wept and laughed and hated according to the impulse of their hearts. (*He takes up the green palms deposited at the foot of the altar, and presses them to his breast.*) They gathered the green Earth to their breasts and their lips as I gather these boughs to mine, in what they believed would be an eternal kiss.

[*He remains a little while silent.*

First Friar. I see a light about his head.

Second Friar. I wonder if he has seen God.

Paul Ruttledge. It was then that the temptation began. Not only the Serpent who goes upon his belly, but all the animal spirits that have loved things better than life, came out of their holes and began to whisper. The men and women listened to them, and because when they had lived according to the joyful Will of God in mother wit and natural kindness, they sometimes did one another an injury, they thought that it would be better to be safe than to be blessed, they made the Laws. The Laws were the first sin. They were the first mouthful of the apple, the moment man had made them he began to die ; we must put out the Laws as I put out this candle.

[*He puts out the candle with an extinguisher, still holding the boughs with his left hand. Two orthodox Friars have come in.*

First Orthodox Friar. You had better go for the Superior.

Second Orthodox Friar. I must stop and listen.

[*The First Orthodox Friar listens for a minute or two and then goes out.*

Paul Ruttledge. And when they had lived amidst the green Earth, that is the Love of God, they were sometimes wetted by the rain, and sometimes cold and hungry, and sometimes

alone from one another ; they thought it would be better to be comfortable than to be blessed. They began to build big houses and big towns. They grew wealthy and they sat chattering at their doors ; and the embrace that was to have been eternal ended, lips and hands were parted. (*He lets the boughs slip out of his arms.*) We must put out the towns as I put out this candle.

[*Puts out another candle.*]

A Friar. Yes, yes, we must uproot the towns.

Paul Ruttledge. But that is not all, for man created a worse thing, yes, a worse defiance against God. (*The Friars groan.*) God put holiness into everything that lives, for everything that desires is full of His Will, and everything that is beautiful is full of His Love ; but man grew timid because it had been hard to find his way amongst so much holiness, and though God had made all time holy, man said that only the day on which God rested from life was holy, and though God had made all places holy, man said, " no place but this place that I put pillars and walls about is holy, this place where I rest from life " ; and in this and like ways he built up the Church. We must destroy the Church, we must put it out as I put out this candle. [*Puts out another candle.*]

Friars. He is right, he is right. The Church must be destroyed. . . .

Paul Ruttledge. That is not all. These things may be accomplished and yet nothing be accomplished. The Christian's business is not reformation but revelation, and the only labours he can put his hands to can never be accomplished in Time. He must so live that all things shall pass away. Give me wine out of thy pitchers ! Oh, God, how splendid is my cup of drunkenness ! We must become blind, and deaf, and dizzy. We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life. We must put out hope as I put out this candle. And memory as I put out this candle. And thought, the waster of Life, as I put out this candle. And at last we must put out the light of the Sun and of the Moon, and all the light of the World and the World itself. (*He now puts out the last candle, the chapel is very dark.*) We must destroy the World ; we must destroy everything that

has Law and Number, for where there is nothing there is God.

The Superior expels him from the monastery as a blasphemer and a heretic. But a few friars follow him, and with them Paul founds a new sect, living on roadside charity. Sometimes they have not even a crust of bread, but Paul has nothing to give to his faithful followers. "My sack is quite empty. I will never dip my hand into nature's full sack of illusions!" Nevertheless the faithful continue to follow him, because he possesses the irresistible fascination of the saint, or as Aloysius says, of the "saint of destruction." Paul will march against the cities. The tinkers with whom he once led a common existence once more happen across his path, and Paul will organize them into his army. "We will have one great banner that will go in front . . . and on it we will have Laughter, with his iron claws and his wings of brass and his eyes like sapphires." But he suddenly changes his mind. It is impossible after all to organize even the army of destruction, because organization implies the application of Law and Number, that is to say, of the very source of all evil. "I was forgetting, we cannot destroy the world with armies; it is within our minds that it must be destroyed—it must be consumed in a moment inside our minds."

But his preaching arouses the resentment of the peasants, who stone Paul. He dies like a martyr, but dies willingly, because "Death is the last adventure, the first perfect joy, for at death the soul comes into possession of itself, and returns to the joy that made it." His last words are: "Remember always, where there is

nothing there is God." Sabina, the tinker wench whom he wedded at the roadside, kneels by the corpse, and the play ends.

Granted that all this is sublimely ridiculous, and that the unlucky Paul Ruttledge, as Walkley has said, resembles one of those fishers of whom Rostand once spoke—

Les gens de Lunel ont pêché la lune!

at the same time it is all supremely sincere. Not that Yeats intended to present to us either a madman, or a crackbrained system of philosophy. His intention was simply to dramatize a wild spiritual upheaval. This wild upheaval is both true and human—all the rest is caricature.

On me *Where There is Nothing* produces the effect of a horrible and prolonged burst of laughter—of laughter such as Paul wished to depict upon the banner beneath which he dreamed of marching over the ruins of cities. Against whom this burst of scorn is more especially directed, it is not difficult to guess. Is not England—hated and detested England—the triumph incarnate of Law, Number, and Organization? What ecstasy for an exile from Lunel, if he might extinguish her like one of those candles !

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